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Tuesday, April 12, 1994

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 12, 1994

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the annual report of the Commissioner of Official Languages covering the calendar year 1993 pursuant to section 35(1) of the Official Languages Act.

[Translation]

Consequently, pursuant to Standing Order 108(4)(a), this document is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages.

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[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to eight petitions.

* * *

GLOBAL PARLIAMENTARY APPEAL FOR DEMOCRACY IN BURMA

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, I think you would find unanimous consent of the House at this time for the motion which I would like to propose.

The motion has been drafted following consultations with members from all parties in the House, a motion that is seconded by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, the hon.

member for Longueuil and the member for Kindersley—Lloydminster. I would seek the unanimous consent of the House to propose the following motion:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should urge the Secretary-General of the United Nations to do everything in his power to press the State Law and Order Restoration Council of Burma to take the following measures:

1. The immediate and unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners, with guarantees for their complete freedom.

[Translation]

2. The swift and complete implementation of a transition to civilian rule, as mandated by the May 1990 general election, as per resolution 47/144, entitled "Situation of human rights in Myanmar", which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 18, 1992.

[English]

I would like to thank all members of the House of Commons from all parties who have supported the initiative of the Global Parliamentary Appeal for Democracy in Burma which has been initiated by the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development.

Members have signed petitions and I thank them for their support on this fundamental issue. I thank them for their support of the motion this morning.

(Motion agreed to.)

* * *

(1010)

PETITIONS

NATIONAL FILM BOARD

Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege to rise under Standing Order 36 to present two petitions today, one decrying the decision of the Minister of Canadian Heritage to close the National Film Board office in Saskatoon. This leaves Saskatchewan and Newfoundland the only two provinces without any National Film Board presence. It will cut down on the availability of access to the National Film Board publications.

We have been told that people in Saskatchewan are tired of demonstrating support to maintain the presence of a national institution while national institutions continue to be cut from across Canada and particularly across Saskatchewan.

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THE SENATE

Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Mr. Speaker, second I have a petition signed by over 500 people, mostly from Saskatoon, calling on the government to take measures to abolish the Senate, bearing in mind that it is the home of Tory and Liberal patronage without any basic interest to the Canadian taxpayer.

[*Translation*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Shall the questions be allowed to stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT
SUSPENSION ACT, 1994

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-18, an act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: This is my ruling on Bill C-18, an act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

[*Translation*]

There are three motions in amendment on the Notice Paper for the report stage of Bill C-18, An Act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

[*English*]

Motions Nos. 1, 2 and 3 will be grouped for debate but voted on as follows:

- (a) Motion No. 1 will be voted on separately.
- (b) The vote on motion No. 2 will apply to motion No. 3

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-18 be amended in Clause 2 by replacing line 9, on page 1, with the following:

“until twelve months after the day on”.

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-18 be amended by deleting Clause 3.

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-18 be amended by deleting Clause 4.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as we continue down the trail of haste dealing with Bill C-18, the bill to suspend the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, we suddenly find ourselves at report stage, having gone through a rather hurried committee stage just before the Easter break.

We had gone through a rather hurried committee stage process in dealing with what actually amounts to a very simple bill that tampers with the existing act by suspending it until some unknown and undrafted act is put in its place, or 24 months expire and we do not come up with a solution or a better process for dealing with boundary readjustment. The boundary readjustment process is designed to be a non-partisan politically neutral exercise. By introducing Bill C-18 the government is compromising that neutrality.

(1015)

Elections Canada goes to great lengths to ensure that we have a fair, democratic and unbiased electoral system. We as parliamentarians should respect that principle no matter how these proposed changes may affect us personally.

The process has a built-in appeal structure through which interested groups and individuals, including members of Parliament, can express their concerns about the changes. There has been no great outcry from Canadians to justify Parliament prematurely interfering with these readjustments that are under way.

Those members who are unhappy with the proposed changes can make representation at the appeal hearings. I might add that I have asked to be heard at the appeal hearing in Saskatchewan. Hopefully the process will not be suspended before I have that opportunity.

This is supposed to be a non-political process. An MP should have no more right to effect changes to the electoral boundaries than any other Canadian citizen.

The redistribution that occurred in the past resulted in similar grumblings from MPs but barely a whisper from the electorate. The redistribution of 1974 following the 1971 census was similarly challenged by MPs. It would seem that the Liberal government of the time did not like those proposed changes either and after much debate decided to create 18 new constituencies and send a new commission out to do the work all over again. It sounds familiar, does it not?

Taxpayers will not accept the cost of redoing the commission's work or the cost of additional MPs. This in itself is justification for not supporting the government's proposal for interfering with the electoral process.

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There is one aspect of electoral boundary changes that is a political matter and that is the total number of seats. Canadians have made it abundantly clear that they do not see the need for more members of Parliament. The country's finances are not in a condition to warrant adding the expense of more MPs. Even the physical limitations of this Chamber suggest that it is time to consider placing an upper limit on the number of members in this House. This cap on the House of Commons is the only issue where the Parliament has a legitimate place in considering the issue.

Consideration of the cap on the House is conspicuously absent from any government intentions other than that it has talked about reviewing the numbers of seats with no proposal as to how we can achieve the ends we desire.

We are rather resigned to the fact that we will be blocked by the weight of a heavy-handed Liberal government intent on imposing its will on Parliament without occasion for meaningful debate and honest consideration of amendments.

I believe it is abusing a pillar of democracy, namely the certainty that Canadians will enjoy a fair electoral process free of political gerrymandering and manipulation or even the perception of such and that is no small matter.

Suspending the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act before placing an alternative before Canadians to scrutinize and be endorsed by this House is of great concern to me and to many other Canadians. This is especially so in light of the fact that Elections Canada informed the procedure and House affairs committee that the current act is being administered properly and with no problems.

We have just returned from two weeks in our ridings. I want to state that I heard no public outcry over the proposed electoral boundaries from residents of Saskatchewan, both in my riding and in neighbouring ridings.

Rather, Canadians are worried about the deficit and government waste. They are worried about the dollar and interest rates and an agricultural trade war with the United States. They are worried about failing social safety nets and the hurt being afflicted on them by a government that cannot manage its wallet.

They are worried about the Bloc Quebecois, a party committed to breaking up the country at any and great cost and they are also worried that the government is committed to thwarting Quebec separation without regard to fairness and without regard to principle.

The Liberal government may be looking for a red herring to divert as much attention as possible from the economic and national unity issues, the lack of equal treatment under the law for all Canadians and its pillow-soft approach to criminal justice reform.

Perhaps the electoral boundary debates are convenient red herrings as well as an inconvenience for Liberal MPs who could care less about the economy but want to make darn sure the boundary of their riding is at Fourth Street rather than Tenth Street.

The suspension of the act can serve the Liberal government in three ways. First, it could allow Liberals to tamper with the electoral system for partisan advantages. They have majority control in both the House of Commons and the procedure and House affairs committee to which they wish to give the responsibility of drafting new legislation.

(1020)

Second, as a diversionary tactic to keep attention from its shortfalls it does not want opposition parties, its own backbenchers and the media focusing on the economy and the issues that are important to Canadians.

Third, it attempts to deny the public input and judgment of the public in the current process.

There are flaws in Bill C-18 such as the suspension time. One amendment that we have put forward is that the time of suspension be reduced from 24 months to 12 months.

The current boundaries are based on the 1981 census. We may end up delaying boundary readjustment until after the next election which will happen in 1997 or 1998 if all goes as we expect. That means it is possible that not one election may be based on the 1991 population statistics if the following election were to occur say in the year 2003. It could be based then on the 2001 decennial census. This in fact may be unconstitutional. In any case it certainly breaks the spirit of the law.

A second flaw in Bill C-18 is that it will waste \$5 million because most of the work of the commissioners that is already in place will become unsalvageable.

Could the Reform Party have supported Bill C-18? Possibly. If the Liberal government had categorically stated that it would cap the seats in the House of Commons at a number not greater than the current 295 seats, perhaps that would have been justification for suspending the current process.

Does the government really have a plan to reform the parliamentary system so sparsely populated regions of Canada will receive a fair shake in the electoral process and in decision making? We have a blueprint for that plan and we would be happy to discuss it at any time in this House.

Third, the government has not reassured us that there will be no allowances for patronage and gerrymandering in a new process to replace the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act by agreeing to substantive support from all three recognized parties in the House before enacting a replacement act. We discussed such issues in good faith but the results were not forthcoming.

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There has been no public consultation about the proposed boundary changes. Politicians should not arbitrarily decide to quash the changes before the public is consulted. Since there has been no public concern about the work of the commission, the only reason for dismissing the boundary changes at this point are very partisan and very political.

It is the role of Parliament to ensure that this process is conducted as fairly as possible. It is not our role to choose where or where not the lines are to be drawn. Therefore I support our amendments, first to shorten the suspension period of the current readjustment act from 24 months to 12 months; second, not to cease the work of the current commissioners but to leave them in place so that \$5 million worth of taxpayers' money will not be wasted should the procedure and House affairs committee not come up with a responsible act to replace the current act.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Fernand Robichaud (Secretary of State (Parliamentary Affairs)): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure you as well as all hon. members in this House that, as we are debating this bill, the government wants to respect the non-partisan nature of the electoral boundaries readjustment process. We want it to remain that way and at no time have we made any proposal with a view to changing the non-partisan nature of this process.

I listened carefully to the member from the Reform Party who just spoke. He said that we were right to review the readjustment process, mentioning the fact that, at the present time, with each readjustment, the number of seats automatically increases according to a predetermined formula. He said that, under the present circumstances, it would be desirable for us to consider whether or not this number should keep on increasing, which of course leads to further government expenditures.

(1025)

On the other hand, he also said that we want to limit the debate and that we want to proceed with great haste. Of course, we want to proceed with haste to stop the ongoing process for the simple reason that it costs a lot of money. It is true that a certain amount of work has already been done, but should the process be allowed to go on, even more money will be spent. This is why we tried to come to an agreement with the opposition parties to carry on the review of the process as quickly as possible. I was also surprised to hear the member mention that the government wanted to take advantage of its majority,

[*English*]

the heavy-handed way of the government to try to push this legislation through.

However, there is a contradiction here in that the member says that we want to push this through in a heavy-handed fashion. The member then turns around and argues that if the government were to be heavy-handed in saying that we would limit the number of members in this House at the present level, he would agree with that. I see a contradiction there. It is definitely not the intention of the government to be heavy-handed in that fashion.

We do not want to limit the debate. We want to make sure that every group, every organization and every person who has something to say on the revision of the process has the opportunity to make his presentation.

[*Translation*]

We have problems with the proposed amendments. There again I am surprised. When we drafted this bill and consulted the opposition parties, we proposed an 18 month period but the Reform Party, the very sponsor of the amendments we are debating today, wanted to make sure that the process would be longer; they said that 18 months was not long enough and all of a sudden they propose to reduce this period to 12 months.

We believe that 12 months is too short. We do not believe that this timeframe will cause problems for the committee in charge of reviewing the process, but rather that problems will arise once the committee's review is over. We will have problems in terms of the process which will have to be put in place to implement a new legislative framework based on the committee's recommendations.

We are convinced that the committee of the House in charge of studying this process will propose a solution which will meet and respect the desires of the people and the members who make presentations to the committee; such recommendations will imply changes which will have to be legislated. Therefore, we believe that a 12 month period will not allow the committee or the House to make an in-depth review of the recommendations which will be proposed.

(1030)

That is it for the first amendment. Motions No. 2 and No. 3 are amendments that would maintain the existing commissions. We would have, on the one hand, a House committee which would study the process and propose changes if needed, and on the other hand, the commissions which would continue their studies and consultations, not in relation to the process, but in relation to the readjustment of electoral boundaries.

We believe that this would be a waste of money, and I am surprised that the hon. member who proposed these amendments would want to waste several million dollars. He said that the commissions are already in place, that they have done some

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work, and that their abolition would mean the loss of \$3.5 to \$4 million worth of work.

His amendment would mean an even greater loss, and if we decided at some point to abandon what has been done, we would have wasted \$3 to \$4 million.

That is why we cannot support the amendments proposed this morning.

Motion No. 3 is the logical continuation of Motion No. 2 which would maintain the existing commissions.

For these reasons, we cannot support the amendments proposed this morning.

[*English*]

Mr. Hermanson: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Statements were attributed to me that are not correct. Prior to the introduction of the bill there was a discussion on whether an 18 month period was the proper time for suspension of the bill. In fact my party and I recommended that it be either 12 months or 24 months.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): With all due respect to the hon. member, I believe that is a point of debate rather than a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse): I would like to comment on the three motions before us which were grouped by the Chair.

First of all, I was a bit surprised by the remarks of my colleague from Kindersley—Lloydminster about the Official Opposition's attitude. Once again, we have heard expressions that will be used more and more in the House, as the elections and referendum grow nearer in Quebec. We have heard terms like the breakup of Canada, separatism, that kind of language. I do not see what that has to do with Bill C-18 and I do not know what the member from Kindersley—Lloydminster is getting at. He probably does not know himself.

As for Bill C-18 and the amendments proposed today, the authors of the three motions did raise some good points. In fact, we could speak of two motions, since the third one is just a consequence of the second one.

The main thing that comes out of these motions and the whole debate and what prompts my first comment is that we are considering limiting the number of members in the House. It may be a worthwhile, even noble objective. As you know, Mr. Speaker, Quebec governments, even the least nationalistic ones, have always insisted on a clause guaranteeing 25 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons to Quebec.

(1035)

Under the present federal system, Quebec is guaranteed this representation. Assuming it remains in the federation, some-

thing which is also hypothetical, then Quebec should retain one quarter of the seats in Parliament. Limit the number of seats, by all means, but only after giving Quebec assurances that it will retain its current level of 25 per cent representation in the House of Commons.

Mention was also made in earlier debates of the need for a thorough review of a number of provisions, notably section 51 of the Constitution Act, 1867, and of the possibility that some areas or regions of the countries, in particular the Magdalen Islands and the riding of Labrador, could be considered separately. These ridings could be exempted from the process of determining electoral boundaries on the basis of the number of voters in a province. Thus, other ridings either in the province of Newfoundland or in Labrador, as far as the riding of Labrador and the population of the Quebec mainland is concerned, would not have to make up for the fact that Labrador or the Magdalen Islands would be designated as separate ridings. As you know, until 1968, the Magdalen Islands constituted a separate riding.

With respect to the suspension period which the first motion presented by my hon. colleague for Kindersley—Lloydminster seeks to shorten to 12 months, without of course abolishing the commissions, I fail to see the logic of this motion. If we truly want to do a thorough job and review the entire process which has resulted in periodic readjustments to the electoral map, a process which has not been thoroughly reviewed and closely scrutinized since 1964, then a twelve-month suspension of operations seems clearly inadequate. We would be hamstrung by this provision. To all intents and purposes, we would be better off not passing Bill C-18 instead of limiting ourselves to a twelve-month suspension.

In order to undertake a thorough review, we need the 24 month suspension provided for in the bill. Therefore, I cannot support the proposed amendment, any more than I can support maintaining the current commissions in operation. What work would there be for them to do? Again, we would have a case where commissions would be paid to do nothing. We do not need this. Enough money is being wasted already.

All the same, it is somewhat astonishing to hear a Reform Party member say that he wants to continue wasting public funds. We do not need this. If we have to suspend the process, then let us do it. In two years' time, when the review process is undertaken again, other persons can be appointed. We could reappoint the same persons. Some may have changed careers or even passed away. We will have to adjust accordingly.

Why should we artificially maintain the commissions? Rather, we should establish new ones at the appropriate time, that is, within the 60 day period set out in clause 4 of Bill C-18. There is no reason for us to keep the commissions going, unless the hon. members of the Reform Party have friends on the commissions whom they want to protect. Well if this is the case, then they should say so clearly. But if it is not the case, we have no need of commissions that do not work.

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It is quite enough that we have another House that does not work, Mr. Speaker, without having commissions that sit idle. We should minimize the damage. Maybe we could obtain unanimous consent right now to bring in a constitutional resolution to suspend the current operations and duties of the other House until such time as a new House is reconstituted, one which better reflects the aspirations of Canadians. As for Quebeckers, we will deal in our own way with the problem of the second House.

(1040)

At any rate, Bill C-18 has been tabled, although somewhat late. That is unfortunate, I must say, and the hon. Secretary of State for Parliamentary Affairs probably regrets it too, as it means that we now have to speed up our discussions a little and that a motion for time allocation had to be put forward. Why did the government not act with more diligence? Why was the bill not tabled two weeks earlier, so this situation could have been averted? I do not know why and I will not speculate on this because I would not want to ascribe malicious intent to anyone.

We find ourselves in the somewhat uncomfortable situation where provincial commissions have decided on their own authority to sit since, as the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Jean-Pierre Kingsley, explained in his testimony before the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs—please refer to page 13 of the Evidence of the March 24, 1994 sitting of the said committee and tabled in this House by its chair, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands—the provincial commissions have every right to suspend the hearing process, as long as the September 16 deadline is met. So, the commissions have decided to start sitting.

I respect their decision, while I do not agree with it. Clear indication had been given by this House through a vote in second reading on the principle of Bill C-18 that a brake was being put on the process and that it should be brought to a stop.

Some people are scheduled to appear in a matter of days before provincial commissions, in Quebec in particular, to make representations. Unfortunately, that will all be in vain. I think that it might have been wise to suspend the process for a few days to see what Parliament's decision on Bill C-18 would be, especially in light of clear indications that we were going to stop the process.

That is all I had to say on Bill C-18 for the time being. As I said earlier, as a member of the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I have no intention of taking a firm stand on what I plan to defend in that venue. I have always maintained that I would listen to the testimony with a free hand and no blinkers on, and hear the representations all the interested parties may

want to make, by teleconference or in public hearings across the country, seeing that the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is in control of its own proceedings and, based on the notice of motion put on the Notice Paper of this House, the committee will have plenty of leeway to carry out this review.

For all these reasons, I cannot support any of the motions put forward by my colleague from Kindersley—Lloydminster.

[English]

Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have a chance to participate once again in this important debate. Unfortunately we are being asked to debate legislation in what I think is a highly inappropriate fashion. The government has used time allocation before and has suggested that we needed to rush this matter through Parliament.

I have just spent two weeks in my constituency and I must admit that while people are upset about the proposals in our particular part of British Columbia, they did not feel the matter ought to be a priority of the nation. There was certainly no obvious call to rush legislation that would in a sense sabotage the process.

I speak particularly as a member of Parliament from British Columbia. Once again the people of British Columbia will be shortchanged. Once again we will be skewered. Because Liberal members did not presumably like the boundaries in their areas, British Columbia will be underrepresented in Parliament next time. It is a dynamic part of Canada. Its population is expanding daily as people come from other provinces seeking job opportunities.

(1045)

Basically the government has decided B.C. will be underrepresented in the next Parliament of Canada by deep sixing this updating of the boundaries based on the 1991 census. This is highly undemocratic.

To take up on a point my hon. friend from the Bloc raised, these commissions are now going ahead. A number of people in Kamloops are asking whether they should make presentations to the commission. I respond by saying there is no point. The boundaries presumably will be changed again. The process has been set on the back burner for now. Who knows what the future will bring.

We have spent \$4 million or \$5 million so far on this process. Now we will be spending additional money holding hearings that are nonsensical, meaningless and illogical. There is no point. We are saying there is a public meeting being called on these boundaries where the public's input has no value.

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I know periodically we do silly things, or at least things people perceive to be silly. However with something which is so obviously ridiculous I cannot imagine why these commissioners are soldiering on on a mission impossible but I suppose that is a decision they can make. I call upon them to acknowledge that regardless of where and how these public hearings will be conducted it will cost the taxpayers of Canada money.

Whether or not one agrees with what the Liberal government is doing, it is a reality. As my friend from the Reform Party indicated earlier the Liberals have the muscle in Parliament to do whatever they want anyway.

The Liberal government for whatever reason decided to shortchange British Columbia in the next election. It decided to intercept this arm's length and what should be a non-political, fair process by saying it is going to stop this dead in its tracks. If it has to upset the flow of Parliament it will do that. If it has to use time allocation or a form of closure to muzzle MPs from speaking on this, it will do that too. Unfortunately that is the reality. I hang my head in regret when I see my hon. friends opposite participating in such a way.

In terms of the amendment, the suggestion my hon. friend from the Reform Party has put forward that we reduce the time of waiting to one year makes some sense. It at least gives some hope that this process could be rescued in time for the next general election. I do not think it will. From what my hon. friend opposite has indicated I do not think it is going to get the support of the government, but it is a laudable amendment. It is one we should enthusiastically support.

Hopefully as the debate progresses today other members will see the value of trying to streamline this process so there will be at least some possibility of a more representative and democratic electoral system being in place prior to the next general election.

Knowing the government was bringing in time allocation and had rushed this bill through the committee process prior to the Easter recess, the premier of British Columbia asked me to represent British Columbians' point of view, if I had a chance to speak to this piece of legislation.

For years and years they have felt shortchanged with lack of representation, lack of clout at the cabinet table and wherever. Once again very clearly one of the fastest growing parts of Canada will be let down in terms of democratic and representative representation in the House of Commons after the next general election. Particularly, it will have an impact on the lower mainland of British Columbia and on some of the rapidly growing parts of central British Columbia where there has been tremendous population growth in the last decade and likely will continue in the next few years by all projections.

We support the amendments put forward by our friends in the Reform Party at this report stage process, particularly the one giving us some hope to streamline the operation.

(1050)

It is sad to say with respect but with regret to my friends, to take a particular action which will adversely affect British Columbia and clearly result in one of the most dynamic and fastest growing parts of Canada being improperly represented in the House of Commons is something this party cannot support.

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Kamloops. He and I flew west on the same plane and the same seat when we were going home before the Easter break.

Mr. Riis: Different seats.

Mr. Grey: Yes, different seats. The same pair of seats then, forgive me. Maybe we are saving a lot of money then. I had better get on with Bill C-18 as soon as possible.

We had an interesting talk on the plane about this whole idea and what it is that is happening here. All of us on both sides of the House need to look at it. Why is something being rammed through as quickly as possible? My antennae go up as soon as I see something like that. I suspect the Canadian public feels very much the same way. As soon as it sees something going into a crisis mode it wants to stop, wait, look and ask why we are being thrown into a crisis mode all of a sudden.

The issue here is the fact this is being rammed through Parliament so quickly. It was most unfortunate for people on the government side that we had to take Easter recess. This was something we know they wanted to ram through on the eve of Easter recess. It was a pity for the government. It was in a flap because it could not get this thing pushed through.

Antennae should go up right across the country when we see something like that happening. We should be asking questions. Why the rush? I do not see the need for the rush, quite frankly, except of course we know the timetable is in place for the current process to have the public hearings start very soon. That then demands there be a crisis for the government because it wants to cut that debate. It wants to shut down and put a lid on the public having any process or any input into these hearings. When people on the government benches go into the crisis mode saying to stop this thing cold and shut it down, then one wonders why this public process is being thwarted.

No, the process was not perfect before. However as soon as we see whatever process is in place, warts, flaws and all of the problems with it, it is a process that has been put into place and the public has not given a great outcry. There has not been a crisis from time to time except in Parliament because people are

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self-serving and they see that maybe they stand to lose their ridings.

I have mentioned I am one of those people. Beaver River as we know it now and as we love it stands to be eliminated under the current process. If we are typical politicians therefore, of all people I should probably be self-serving and say that I am going to lose my riding and I am going to hang on to it just as hard as I can. No.

The public is saying: "Let us go to those public hearings. Let us make representation. Let us voice some of our concerns with this current process. Let us not just slam the thing shut". If we are looking at how democratic that really is surely to goodness that is the farthest thing from true democracy.

Before I get into some of the things I heard during my spring tour when I was home, some of the concerns that people have about this process, let me just say it is so frustrating to watch this matter unfold from the inside out. We are looking at something which is going to go to the other place and get thumped through there as quickly as possible. It does make one nervous.

I know it makes many government members nervous as well. It is sad to say the lid has been put on them too in saying: "Oh no, just let those members talk about it". Talk about it we will because it is something that needs to be talked about. We say if there are going to be public hearings let them go ahead. Let the public be heard on this.

In my constituency over the last couple of weeks I conducted my full spring tour of town hall meetings and many other meetings. Following are some of the things I heard.

(1055)

They are concerned about the process as it is in place now. Let us call it the old process. There are frustrations with it. It is not perfect. However, they are willing to take their lumps and go through the procedures that are set up and put in place. If it is public hearings they must go to, then it is public hearings they will go to. If that is their chance on providing input according to the Constitution and the way this has been carried out for years and years regarding redistribution and limits, then they will do it because that is the process set in place. They are willing to abide by those rules and regulations.

Any number of people asked me again and again: "When are the hearings scheduled for this area, Deborah?" There is concern that they will be at one o'clock in the afternoon when most good people are busy about their day's work. They do have frustrations about that.

Let me assure you they have far more reservations and frustrations about something which is going to be thrown in place. Over and above that, to put the kibosh on this particular process and waste the \$5 million that has already been spent to have politicians come up with something better?

I mentioned this in second reading. If you think there are fingerprints on the present process let me assure you there are bigger and blacker fingerprints on any process that will come up as a result of Bill C-18. I can guarantee that because I know exactly what it is that people are feeling. Government members know this and feel it as well.

Many people were pleased that the whole matter will be put on ice. I must say the people in the constituency of Beaver River appreciate it. They like the name. It is a generic name for an area that has any amount of history. I know there is a Beaver River in Ontario as well. My friend and I have talked about that.

Beaver River is a significant area in northeastern Alberta. The voyageurs and the water runners went up the Beaver River and portaged a few miles across to the Athabasca River and then went up north. Historically it is an incredibly exciting area of northeastern Alberta. The best part of its being called Beaver River is that it is an area and not a particular place. There is a store and a little community of Beaver River, but it is a waterway we are looking at and an area with history attached to it.

The new name of this constituency will be Vegreville—St. Paul, if and when the old goes through, if the government for some fluke does not manage to push C-18 through. Who knows what will happen in the other place and whether Bill C-18 will really go through or not.

Looking at the old process, the way it is going right now, if Beaver River is eliminated the new constituency will be called Vegreville—St. Paul. Let me reiterate what I heard from people on my spring tour, for example the mayor of Bonnyville which is north and east of St. Paul, far north and east of Vegreville, and people in the community of Grand Centre—Cold Lake which is far north and east again of Bonnyville. As soon as you pick a place, i.e., Vegreville—St. Paul, people in those communities say: "Let us assure you, there is life beyond St. Paul".

People have real concerns about the name. They want to know why it is that a particular town or a couple of towns are named. I see their point. They make that point well. Let us look at an area rather than singling out one or two towns. I appreciate their viewpoints. I am committed to doing everything I can, whether it is under the old process or the new, to say this is a region, an area. We have gifts. We have abilities in this particular area. Maybe it is wiser yet to celebrate the fact of an area or a group rather than zeroing in on one or two towns. As soon as one town is named then somewhere else is omitted. They are worried about that.

People question why these particular boundaries. Of course the government benches would say it was a Tory mapmaker. Maybe it was but I have no knowledge of that. I do know they were appointments to the commission from the Speaker of the House. However what about Liberal mapmakers? Could there be such a thing as a Liberal cartographer in this country, heaven

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forbid? If this were going to happen it might amaze us all to discover that in fact there are Liberal mapmakers in Canada. What process is there in Bill C-18 that would exempt us from naming, heaven forbid, a Liberal mapmaker?

(1100)

We can see how flawed the process is when somebody goes into crisis mode or when somebody decides we have to do it now. It makes me think of a homebuilding ad: why wait for spring; do it now.

An hon. member: Do it now.

Miss Grey: An hon. member says: "Do it now". He is concerned about doing it now. I would like to ask why now is so important if we have spent \$5 million on it. The reason now is so important is that the hearings have started. People are getting to view and voice their concerns publicly. I suspect it would seem very obvious across the country that the public is asking why the hurry. There have been the Charlottetown and Meech Lake accords. I could go on and on. Why the hurry? Why the rush?

Something is underground that needs to surface, that needs to be discussed in the public hearings. Let us not do it now. Let the public hearings go on. Let people talk about it and make representations to the commissioners.

They laugh on the other side of the House. It is most unfortunate. There is no need to proceed with this in crisis mode, as crisis intervention. This is the process put in place. Let us follow that process. Let us see what comes of these public hearings. Then let us have the government make some wise and reasoned recommendations after the public hearings, certainly not before.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to report stage of Bill C-18, an act to suspend the electoral boundaries readjustment process. Specifically I will take a few minutes to speak on the amendments presented by my colleague from Kindersley—Lloydminster.

Those amendments fit into two categories. The first amendment would limit the suspension for 12 months. The second one would formally keep the commissions that are established and in existence pending the suspension so that they could restart their work in the event it was required.

Both these amendments are not really our preference. Our preference is that the bill not proceed. Let me make that absolutely clear. We have suggested these particular amendments to put the government to the test on a couple of its stated reasons for proceeding and some of its concerns.

The 12 month period is very clear. We have examined the bill and the issue. It seems that if we look at a 24 month suspension

as proposed in the bill we are looking at a possible constitutional problem.

Obviously there are different legal opinions on that. The government's own lawyers do not see it that way, but the argument is really quite straightforward. We would suspend the process for 24 months. The process that would then have to go into effect under the law would be the existing process which would restart from scratch. All the previous money spent would have been wasted.

Then we would have a process that would clearly not be completed until after the next election which means the results could not be implemented until the subsequent election. That subsequent election would be after the next decennial census.

Our Constitution requires that we redistribute seats in the Chamber once every 10 years. In effect the purpose of the bill is to violate the Constitution. It clearly violates the demand that the seats be readjusted every 10 years. If the bill were to go through in its current state that would be the legal state. The Constitution would not be obeyed as a consequence of the particular piece of legislation.

The government may argue that in the meantime it will have another process, that it will actually start sooner and all the other considerations, but that is not the legal state created by this piece of legislation.

It is a fairly innocuous amendment. Those who really want to pass the bill could accept this amendment. It would make no difference to their overall agenda here. It is very clear what that is, but they could pass this one in good faith.

(1105)

Also in good faith they could pass the amendment to allow the existing commissions and commissioners to remain in place. The opposition to this particular amendment is even more bizarre. Some of the arguments we have heard privately and publicly are that we might have to pay these people, as if we could not suspend their pay during the period in question. One member told me they might die in the next 12 months. They might die even if the process continues. I am not sure what particular difficulty that would cause.

Of course we get into the whole argument that all this would save money. With this particular debate we are suspending the process, getting rid of the first \$5 million we spent so that we can save money. In the end we restart the process from scratch. We spend all the money we spent before; we spend it over again and then we spend some more.

This is an interesting way to save money, even if there were money to be saved. We could propose on the floor of the House that we suspend the next election altogether. After all elections cost money. Why do we not just sit here forever? I am a young

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guy. I could use the job. Maybe I do not want the job that long, but I could use it for a few more years. Why do we not just forget about having elections, save money and suspend the electoral process? These are very peculiar reasons.

Let us look at the history of this matter. The intent is very clear in the way the debate has proceeded. The bill was introduced at first reading and had only been on the Order Paper for a couple of days when we proceeded to second reading. At second reading the government was not prepared to put up many speakers. The benches over there emptied. The wind whistled through and the tumbleweeds blew through. There was really nothing to say on this legislation. We put up some speakers to provide debate on the issue, as did the New Democratic Party. Immediately, after one day of debate, it was labelled as a filibuster. As a consequence closure was brought in for the first time in this Parliament.

What is happening now is that the government decries—and the Bloc Québécois speaker this morning decried it—that in the meantime they are having public hearings, that the commission has not listened, that Elections Canada has not listened, that they are proceeding with public hearings and that they have to be stopped.

This illustrates precisely why we have this kind of process. Politicians are not supposed to be in charge of it. Elections Canada is an independent agency. The law is on the books. All of that is fairly transparent.

Let me quote no other expert than the hon. member for York South—Weston. In the *Globe and Mail* of March 25 the following statement on which I will elaborate at third reading appeared: “It is hard to see what was done here as anything other than self-interested politics, said renegade Liberal MP John Nunziata of Toronto. It makes no sense other than for self-preservation and MPs’ convenience”.

That is a frank statement. We all know there is no public outcry over this matter. There is a public hearing process for people who want to discuss it, but there is no demand out there that we stifle the process of redistribution and start it all over again.

The government is bringing in a related motion saying that we should study the process. That is perfectly valid. I said before that we were studying just about everything Parliament is supposed to be doing; we are studying rather than acting. We could study the process of electoral boundary readjustment. That would be valid. If we are to do that I would suggest we really should be doing it for the next time. Now that this process is under way and has already been suspended once before I do not think there is any way we could get ourselves involved in it without the fairly obvious charges of gerrymandering and the

other things we are beginning to read about in the newspapers. That is how we should be handling the particular issue.

(1110)

On the number of seats we repeat once again our offer to the government. When processes have been suspended or changed in the past it has been because there has been an alteration to the amending formula. If there really is concern about costs and the number of MPs we would be prepared to support an amendment to that effect. It would provide a reason to suspend the process the public would support. In the absence of that there is no reason given.

Let me just conclude by making one last statement. I noted very carefully the remarks of my friend from the Bloc Québécois who talked about Quebec’s need for one quarter of the seats in the House of Commons. I have wondered what was behind the Official Opposition being involved in a government desire to change the rules of the electoral game. I hope it is not another back door Meech Lake or Charlottetown. That particular provision is not helpful.

As the hon. member for Kamloops indicated the real loser is British Columbia. The real opposition to the particular direction of setting up a quarter of the seats was by British Columbia. It would require a constitutional amendment. I hope there is no way we will come up with a back door formula through this process that will produce that kind of effect. I look forward to saying more at third reading.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup): Mr. Speaker, when I spoke in the first debate on this bill, we accepted the two-year delay. The Reform Party’s arguments against this delay were not considered valid, but we understood that they were fundamentally opposed to it.

However, today we are faced with an in-between position which I think is the worst of the worst. This amendment would have the consultation go on so long that I think it is totally inefficient. I think that over the Easter break, when we were in our ridings more, the people clearly told us that they had other concerns besides redrawing the electoral map. People in Quebec and Canada now want someone to really fight unemployment; they do not want to be satisfied with crumbs like the infrastructure program.

As for the deficit, people were so amazed by the decisions of this government which, after crying wolf for months, brought forth a mouse. When we tell them that we will debate whether the reform of the electoral map should proceed right away, in two years or be amended after twelve months, they think that we are not doing the work we are paid to do. I think that the Reform Party is contradicting itself on some other essential aspects of its program.

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However, some Reform members took the floor to say that the Bloc Québécois was a party that wanted to break up Canada, that wanted to use the back door, as with Meech Lake or Charlottetown, to arrive at another kind of reform. I would like to tell them that the Charlottetown Accord was rejected not only by Quebec but by all of Canada. I think that Canadians were right to do so. They thought that they should oppose all the elected governments in Canada which were offering them something cooked up in secret that did not at all meet their needs.

As for Meech Lake, Quebec did not prevent it from being passed. Its provisions were certainly a bare minimum for Quebec, but it was not necessarily us who had it set it aside. But it made Quebeckers aware that, in the end, our problem is not a matter of plumbing but of architecture.

(1115)

In this respect, for Canada to take the time to think about the electoral map is not a bad thing because we have basic decisions to make on the future structure of Canada as a whole, whether there will be two countries. It is a decision Quebeckers will be called upon to make in the near future. I think it is much more important to start off by settling the basic question of the most appropriate structure for the future we want to have.

As far as “breaking up Canada” is concerned, I would like to say that no country in the world lasts forever. Structures change and, just as the caterpillar develops into a butterfly, there is a way to change and adjust to new realities. Today’s economic markets are very big; it is no longer necessary to be as big as the economic markets we are dealing with. That being the case, I think it is important to give ourselves appropriate structures. We can give ourselves enough time to think about what form the Canadian electoral map we lived with last year should take in the future, so that we can make wise decisions and take into account other factors besides population distribution.

In a region such as eastern Quebec, the proposed reform of the electoral map eliminates one riding and creates another where there is a distance of 300 kilometres between two cities. I reiterate what I said earlier: 300 kilometres in summer and 1,000 kilometres in winter. Such decisions or recommendations by a commission fulfilling its mandate under the current legislation were totally inapplicable and unacceptable, and we prepared to intervene before the electoral commission to argue for maintaining the ridings in eastern Quebec. We were ready to do so.

This bill was undoubtedly tabled late because it puts us in a funny situation where we must prepare in case passage of the bill is delayed while fulfilling our mandate as members of Parliament because, as members of the Bloc, we made a commitment to look after Quebec’s interests. We are doing so now in the current context, under this government, to ensure that, if Quebeckers decide to stay within Canada, they have the best tools available. But we think they will make a different choice, especially when we see the federal Parliament spend so much

time on such issues that we are entitled to question effectiveness and dual representation in Canada. I think there are more fundamental issues to put forward before spending a whole day debating whether the suspension period should be 12 or 24 months.

We could ask ourselves whether it is worthwhile to spend so much time debating this. I think the Reform Party should examine its amendments to this bill when it argues, strangely enough, that the Bloc Québécois wants to break up Canada, since the Bloc will vote with the Government of Canada on this bill. It is not a matter of basic principles but of effectiveness, political realism and respect for the people who should have enough time to influence the political system and the electoral commissions so that future decisions take into account other factors besides the purely demographic aspects provided for in the act, as I was saying earlier.

In conclusion, I think it is important to take into account, for example, the number of municipalities or the area to be covered so that when the map is redrawn in 24 months, it will be what Quebeckers and Canadians want, unless Quebeckers decide before then to give themselves a political structure that is much more appropriate for their development.

(1120)

I am confident that is what will happen in the coming year. I think we should put all our energy into making our political structures more adequate and not only into fixing the plumbing.

[English]

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver): Mr. Speaker, at a time when our dollar is plunging and our interest rates are on the rise, the Liberal government should be ashamed of what it is trying to do with Bill C-18. It is imposing the will of unhappy Liberal MPs on the voters of Canada, members who perhaps are worried that they will not be re-elected to collect their gold plated pension plans.

I do not think they will be re-elected anyway. Therefore, they should support the amendments that we have proposed or preferably should defeat this Bill C-18 altogether.

Without regard to the huge investment of time by the Electoral Boundaries Commissions and without regard to the millions of dollars which have already been spent on a non-partisan process, the government is going to ram through an ill-conceived and selfish piece of legislation.

Politicians have no business setting their own electoral boundaries. Human nature dictates that members could act in their own interests to trim areas of opposition from their ridings or to add little pieces of support to their ridings. Even if that did not happen there could be the suspicion that it was happening.

The important thing is that the whole process should be seen to be non-partisan. Politicians should have absolutely nothing to do with the process.

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To illustrate this point I would like to mention something that was said by a government member earlier in this debate. That member claimed that Reformers were being inconsistent in wanting to amend Bill C-18 to alter the period of suspension to 12 months. Reform originally argued against the proposed 18 month suspension because it would have given the Liberal government an advantage in deciding when the election would be and in deciding whether the old boundaries or some new boundaries would apply during the next election.

In negotiations Reform took the position that either 24 months or 12 months was better than 18 because at least then it would be clear what was going to happen. Of course we prefer the 12 month suspension because at least the process could get restarted again and we have a chance that the non-partisan process would be completed before the next election.

All hon. members who value democracy should work to defeat Bill C-18 and at the very least should agree to the suspension by 12 months rather than the 24.

I join many other members who have spoken against Bill C-18 in expressing my concern that B.C. is the province that will be most hurt by the bill. The increase in population of B.C. entitles us to two more seats in the House. Even if we were to hold the number of seats constant, at the very least they should be redistributed to give a more fair representation for the province of B.C.

In my riding of North Vancouver the proposed changes would take a small section at the eastern end of my riding, isolated between the harbour to the east, the harbour to the south, the mountains to the north and sort of append it to another riding on the other side of the harbour, the riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam.

The people in that part of my riding can see that is an impractical way to re-arrange the riding. It is very clear that the member in the Port Moody—Coquitlam area would have to move through two other ridings in order to get to this little appendage that would suddenly be attached to her riding.

However, even though it is clear that isolating this small portion of North Vancouver is not in the public interest, the voters in my area have confidence in the process. They have confidence that by appeal to the commission that this decision would be reversed and a much more sensible decision would be made.

Everyone can see from looking at the map that this particular adjustment was not sensible. Even I, living in that portion and will have my home transferred to another riding, agree with the

process and I am prepared to take my chances with the commission and the hearings.

(1125)

I vigorously oppose Bill C-18. I am proud that the Reform Party members can stand and say that they were against this government attempt to ram the bill through in a clandestine fashion on a Friday afternoon when nobody is watching style of thing.

In time Canadians will recognize that Reformers once again stood up for democracy while the government stood up for the old line Victorian style of politics. Shame on them, Mr. Speaker.

Miss Grey: S.O.S. Save our seats.

Mr. White (North Vancouver): As the hon. member says, S.O.S. Save our seats. That is the whole attitude of the Liberal government. I urge them to take the moral high road and to vote against this bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean H. Leroux (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, as you rightly stated, last October 25, I was elected to represent the riding of Shefford. Let me first describe my wonderful riding. As you know, the region was settled by a group of Americans who came to Canada when the United States seceded from England. Thus, it is part of Quebec's Eastern Townships.

Over time, the boundaries of the riding changed and now include part of Montérégie, and, as I mentioned, part of the riding is in the Eastern Townships.

Shefford is partly an urban riding. The main city is Granby, a well-organized industrial city. The people of Granby are hard-working and they are proud of their roots.

I have lived virtually all my life in Shefford. At times, I moved from one area to another, but I never left the riding.

A proposal has been made to change my riding, to reduce its size. Other ridings would be extended while mine would be reduced to the size of the provincial riding of Shefford, including the town of Bromont. As you know, there is much discussion these days about Bromont, because of the Hyundai plant. Bromont is currently my neighbour. I would like members in the House to know that Bromont was previously known as West Shefford. This city was then part of the former riding of Shefford. Of course, we would welcome its constituents in the proposed new riding of Shefford, but, to do so, we would have to lose an entire section of the riding. So, the sector which includes Saint-Paul-d'Abbotsford, Saint-Césaire and Marieville is to be removed.

In fact, my riding is being downsized tremendously, while the neighbouring one, Chambly, will become extremely large with a population of over 100,000. While my constituency would have some 72,000 or 75,000 people, the one next to it would become exceedingly large.

I believe that the role of a member of Parliament is to represent his or her constituents. I think one of the objectives of this bill is to make ridings more or less equal in terms of population. If this is the case, we are missing the boat because, as I was saying, my constituency is going to become much less populated, while neighbouring ridings will be much larger.

In view of this situation, I decided to consult the municipalities. I asked members of my staff to consult municipalities and also contact other political parties in the riding. Because as you know, Mr. Speaker, we Bloc Québécois members do not aspire to remain part of Canada, part of the Government of Canada any longer than necessary. However, one thing is certain: we have to think about the interests of those whom we represent.

(1130)

As my colleague was saying earlier, we do not know what the future holds, but if what we want to do here cannot be fully achieved, Quebecers will continue to be represented here in Ottawa, which is something we do not wish, as I mentioned earlier. It is in the interests of our constituents that we consulted a large number of our municipalities, if not all of them, since one of them told us that it did not really care. As you know, there are municipalities close to the boundaries which change ridings every time a readjustment is made. The municipality of Saint-Valérien, in Shefford, told us that it would like to become part of the beautiful riding of Saint-Hyacinthe.

We can certainly understand that, since the residents of Saint-Valérien have constantly been moved from one riding to the other following these readjustments, but this is somewhat unfortunate. These people do not feel as close to the heart of the riding which is the city of Granby.

On the other hand, the municipalities of Saint-Césaire, Saint-Paul-d'Abbotsford and L'Ange-Gardien, all beautiful villages which I hope you will come to visit when you have a chance, Mr. Speaker, have sent us council resolutions asking that they remain in the riding of Shefford because they feel part of it. These people have always gone shopping in Granby on Thursday or Friday evening. They do their business in that city. I believe that it would be somewhat unfortunate for them to become part of another riding.

The small municipality of Béthanie sent me a fax of its council resolution which I want to read because I find it interesting:

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Whereas if the electoral boundaries readjustment is approved, the electoral quota of Shefford would only be 73,351, which is less than the majority of other constituencies; Whereas Béthanie is located very close to Granby and several services are provided to us by Granby, including ambulances, provincial police, hospital and other services, the municipality of Béthanie wishes to remain part of the constituency of Shefford, since it participated in the election of its member of Parliament, Jean Leroux, and it wishes to keep being represented by him. It is also easier to communicate with him, since there is no long distance charge and since his office is closer to our area.

This resolution was carried unanimously, Mr. Speaker.

An hon. member: Nice going.

Mr. Leroux (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, Béthanie is a small municipality. On election day, there is only one polling station, and the majority of people there voted for the Bloc Québécois. Since they live on the periphery of the riding, they have asked to remain part of Shefford, and that to me is what is important. The people who make up the constituency are the ones who should have the last word.

And we are going to stand up for these people and defend the interests of these small municipalities. I think they have their say in this matter.

A member is elected to represent all the residents of his or her riding. What this bill does is divide my riding in two and make the constituents who will have to leave the riding feel like temporary residents. To me, that is unacceptable. I think we should not let these citizens down, and I certainly have no intention of doing so. All of my constituents are entitled to equitable services.

Members are elected to represent their ridings and that is what we are doing here, in this House. Each and every one of us, whatever our political affiliation is, has a role to play, which is to represent our constituents. We also have the privilege to sit in this House and speak when we want to. This is a privilege which is not extended to all citizens. The people put their trust in us and we are here to represent their views. When we rise to speak in this House, we talk on behalf of our constituents. On the matter of electoral boundaries readjustment, our task is made very easy. We intend to make our position known to the Commission, because we think it is fair and equitable. If there are some municipalities which have not expressed the desire to stay in Shefford, we respect their decision. However, the vast majority of municipalities which are affected want to remain part of Shefford. As a member of Parliament, I intend to protect the interests of these people.

(1135)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Before resuming debate, I want to thank the hon. member for Shefford for his invitation. I must say that I have travelled to Granby several times, with my wife, my children and other members of my family, to participate in hockey tournaments in winter and to visit Granby Zoo in

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summer. I wish to thank the hon. member again for his invitation. We always got a warm welcome.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Fraser Valley East.

[*English*]

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East): Mr. Speaker, on that invitation you would be a busy person because I am sure you will be invited to all our ridings.

I am always impressed—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I would accept all invitations. If I accept them all I might have to speak to what other members referred to earlier, a new mode of travel possibly. I do not know if it was a seat sale that was alluded to or otherwise, but I will accept all invitations.

Mr. Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I always take heart, and it happens so frequently in the House as the previous hon. member mentioned, in talking about privileges of the House. The other thing that always impresses me is how passionately every member speaks about his or her own riding as they introduce the subject of what it is that makes their riding. Often it is called a microcosm of the Canadian identity. Often each member in their own way does represent that here in the House and it is always encouraging to me when I hear members talking with pride about their constituencies. Of course I do extend an invitation to you, especially since last week it was 24 degrees in Fraser Valley East. But I do not want to rub that in.

I do want to address the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Suspension Act and also our proposed Reform Party amendments to it which I think would make it more palatable to Canadians and to those of us who are concerned with certain parts of this suspension procedure.

There is of course a huge boundary readjustment of my own that I am faced with in Fraser Valley East. The boundaries have now been extended to include the Merritt—Princeton area of the interior of B.C. It would make a logistical nightmare in some senses for me to try to service a riding that has three separate highways, each with one small town at the end of it. It would be very difficult.

I think it is important that we deal with the principle involved, not my own personal feelings about whether I agree with the adjustments in my own riding, in boundary alignments and readjustments. That is what I would like to address here this morning.

There are five particular reasons why I think this bill should never become law. First, I believe it thwarts the purpose of Parliament in the electoral process. The Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act requires the readjustment of the federal electoral boundaries every 10 years. That is a requirement of an act of Parliament that has already been passed.

The first eight sections of the act deal with the appointment of the commissions that will decide these issues for the provinces and how those commissions are made up, how they are appointed and so on.

The important thing is that these commissions have almost a judicial impartiality. It is important that they have the freedom to make choices based on the impartiality that they supposedly have based on the requirements of the act.

When the Speaker or the chief justice of each province appoints someone to the commission, those are almost judicial positions. We have to accept that they are without prejudice. I believe we have to go along with their ideas at least as it fits into the process or else we thwart the purpose of Parliament.

Parliament specifically and importantly prohibits anyone in the Senate or anyone who is a member of Parliament from being part of that commission. The reason of course is because they do not want political interference. They do not want the partisanship that could enter into electoral boundary redistribution to be a part of it. It has to be impartial and it has to be seen to be impartial.

The timeliness of these changes is also important to me.

(1140)

It states in section 13 of the act that as soon as possible after the completion of any decennial census, which is every 10 years, the chief statistician gives a report to the chief electoral officer and they calculate the seats and so on. The important thing here is the timeliness. As soon as possible after a census we need to make our redistribution so that we can more accurately reflect the needs of the shifting populations and so on in each of the provinces. "Then each commission shall prepare", it says under section 14, "with all reasonable dispatch a report."

The last census was in 1991, which is already going back three years, and so timeliness has already been thwarted once, I believe, by the last Parliament because it suspended the act for two years. That is not a big thing in some people's minds, but again it thwarts an impartial boundary readjustment. I am very nervous when parliamentarians interfere with what I believe should be an independent body and an independent report.

All boundaries were supposed to be redrawn as soon as possible after 1991. The last bill, C-67, halted the whole process. All 11 government commissions were eliminated. It was a total waste of their time and effort and the money involved.

I wonder why at this time we have to again dive into this process and shut the whole thing down again, with another \$5 million being spent. I can only speculate. I know the new boundaries may be inconvenient but they are inconvenient for us all. Politics never was totally convenient. It could be that MPs

have to make new political contacts as their boundaries are shifted. Be that as it may, that is also part of this impartiality. It could even include boundaries in some areas that traditionally vote against the member. Some areas vote stronger for certain parties than others. Possibly that has caused some concern on the government side.

I am not sure what it is but regardless of how you slice it we are three years late already in what was supposed to be a very timely thing and now we are going to put it off for another two years, which means there will be another election and so on.

I think it is a mistake to keep putting off what should be an independent—I repeat independent—review. Our first amendment to this bill is that we should bring in a report. If we are going to have this interference, we should at least have it in place for the next federal election.

I am concerned about B.C. which is the fastest growing province and which already should have an extra two or three seats. We are going to go into the next century with the same number of seats and the same distribution that we had in 1981. Since 1981 we have had from within Canada alone over 40,000 people move to B.C., mainly from Ontario. There is a shift in population westward. There are 35,000 additional people who came from overseas. We get 20 per cent of all Canada's immigrants. B.C.'s population continues to grow at a faster rate than the rest of Canada and yet we are going to be stuck with a proportional representation that is mired in the 1980s.

People in B.C. have mentioned that this is unfair, it is not proportional representation, and it is going to skew the power base away from the growing population centres and leave it in the eastern areas, some of which have been nice enough to send us their people to populate B.C.

I am not sure if that is the intention of the government in bringing this in. I am not sure if it is concerned about maintaining a power base where it happens to have most of its seats. I am not sure exactly why it has been done.

I come back to the idea of impartiality, that Canadians have to accept and have to know with regard to boundary readjustments and the way this is put together that the people who sit on the commission are not political hacks. They are not doing things for the favour or the benefit of any one party. They are doing it truly for the benefit of the democratic process. I think that is thwarted, especially by delaying it for two years, which means another election that we would have to go through.

I support our first amendment which would bring it forward in a more timely fashion and would allow us to get on with whatever changes the government deems necessary in time for the next election. That could take some of the sting out of this. Some of the waste and so on would be easier to accept if we

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knew that a timely settlement of some sort was in the government's mind. I wish it would consider that first amendment thoughtfully.

(1145)

I mentioned earlier the whole idea of cost. All the commission's work and the money spent in 1991 and 1992 were wasted. On the current process all of us received in the mail or saw in the newspapers a proposal for boundary readjustments. I have already asked to make a submission to the commission about boundary readjustments. I have some ideas, and all of us are free to make presentations to them.

Those meetings have been set up. They have been advertised. The entire newspaper propaganda idea through which all these ideas were sent to every Canadian household has taken place at huge expense. That expense is all for nought. It is a waste of the commissioners' time and it is a waste of our money.

I realize that \$5 million is not the end of the world in some people's minds, but as a couple of people coming out of Parliament once said, a billion here and a billion there soon adds up to real money. Possibly government should consider that every \$5 million is a significant amount of money, not just a chunk of change.

For all of the reasons that I mentioned earlier and especially because this has been done behind closed doors and brought in by closure and so on, it leaves a very bad taste in my mouth. I hope the government will accept an amendment that will bring it in before the next election and restore faith in the impartiality of our Electoral Boundaries Commission.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm): I am pleased to take part in this debate, Mr. Speaker, all the more so since I did not have a chance to speak at the time of the first debate because the guillotine went down before I could take the floor.

I want to take advantage of the motion moved by the Reform Party to tell you a little about my constituency and explain to you why this amendment by the Reform Party is unenforceable or illogical.

The object of the main motion is to reduce the suspension period of the law from 24 to 12 months and to delete sections 3 and 4 of the said bill. Since it will take more than 24 months to redress the illogical readjustments made to several constituencies, I am against shortening the suspension period of this act.

And I will tell you why. My native constituency was in turn called Berthier—Maskinongé, Berthier—Maskinongé—Lanau-dièrè and, finally, Berthier—Montcalm. It was moved geographically from left to right without ever finding its true niche and it seems to me that following each and every adjustment, the

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people most concerned were still making the same complaints and the same comments.

That is why, even though I sincerely hope that the people of Quebec will know where their interests and the best interests of Quebec lie in a possible referendum, I decided to hold a major consultation with my constituents.

Promoting Quebec's sovereignty should not prevent me from doing that since the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act is still in force. I think it is my duty as a member of Parliament to follow the work of a commission which will ultimately cost Canadian taxpayers more than \$4 million, of which \$1 million will be paid by Quebec taxpayers whom I represent here.

One should also remember that, following a referendum win in Quebec, a referendum or even an election could be called at the national level. Somebody had to keep an eye on things, and to follow the situation closely.

(1150)

I came to Ottawa to defend Quebec's interests and I think that changes to electoral boundaries are in Quebec's interest. That is why I asked some volunteers in my riding to consult the people.

I think that if a member of Parliament wants to make representations to the commission, he should not base them only on his personal assessment of the situation, but on what his constituents told him. I based my position on those consultations and I will make a few comments in this regard later.

In addition to those consultations, I have known my riding for 30 years. As a lawyer, I was called to the court houses of Terrebonne, Joliette, Trois-Rivières and Shawinigan. The jurisdiction of each one of those courts encompasses a small part of my riding, which is very large.

Since 1986, I have had the chance to study the communities of my riding and get to know them a little. In 1988, my political activities gave me the opportunity to learn more about all those communities. I think that I know the geography, needs, history and characteristics of my riding and its social, economic and political organizations very well. But still, I believe that was not enough to make a fair presentation to the commission.

Despite a member's attachment to the riding that he represents, he cannot decide alone on the representations that he will make to the electoral boundaries commission for Quebec to maintain or to modify the area that he represents.

That is why, as I was saying earlier, I undertook a consultation process with the help of volunteers, and I should take this opportunity to thank people like Ghislaine Guilbault, Raymonde Gaudreault, Jean-Marc Ferland and my staff for their good and loyal services. They all had to work very hard to contact 83

municipalities, RCMs and organizations affected by the new boundaries proposed by the commission for the riding of Berthier—Montcalm.

Of all the parties that were contacted, 25 took the time to write to me and 12 got in touch with me directly to make comments. I think it is important because many of them told me: "Michel, we are taking the time to talk to you because we know, having done so in the past, that it is useless to submit a brief or make proposals to the commission. We think that if a member makes representations on our behalf, he is more likely to be listened to."

I have to say that several municipal politicians have also complained about the commission's reasoning, which they find inconsistent. In trying to solve one problem, the commission is creating another. People say among other things that, in Quebec, boundaries of the RCMs were generally taken into account in the proposed electoral map, but not in the riding of Berthier—Montcalm. In this case, they are being split up to satisfy some mathematical criterion.

It also became evident, through these consultations, that many people are frustrated because they were not able to take part in the process until the new boundaries were almost imposed on Canadians. You will understand that the amendment proposed by the Reform Party does not satisfy them, and I am certainly in a position to tell you so.

Representatives of one municipality even told me that they disagreed completely with the proposals that they saw in the newspapers, but did not intend to submit a brief or make other representations to the commission. The mayor of this municipality told me, and I quote: "The commission must take into account various considerations that cannot be reflected in a single brief. So preparing a brief becomes too arduous a task. My position is based on experience, having submitted briefs to two commissions in the past".

Another mayor pointed out to me on April 8 that the new boundaries were detrimental to his municipality. He wrote: "I want to draw your attention to the drawbacks resulting from such a drastic change for us and our neighbours from Sainte-Lucie and Val-des-Lacs, a population already penalized by the economic situation and absolutely dependent on a social centre with its activities, its schools, its shopping facilities, its social services, the LCSC and the Laurentides General Hospital." He concluded: "It is obvious that the commission is ill-informed about our priorities and our needs".

I contacted this mayor and he told me: "Mr. Bellehumeur, I will not submit a brief because I am sure that I will not be heard, that nobody will listen to me".

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(1155)

Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but conclude that reviewing the electoral boundaries is not just a matter of mathematics. There might not be general agreement about this, but I think it is wrong to say that since there are six million people in Quebec, you just have to divide this number by 75 to get the average number of people to be included in each riding. I think there are much more appropriate, fair and accurate criteria that seem not to have been applied.

One of them that comes up often is services provided to the public. Another is administrative regions. It is illogical to split an RCM that has been part of the riding of Berthier—Montcalm, or of Berthier—Maskinongé —Lanaudière since Confederation and to transfer it to the neighbouring riding of Joliette. As I was saying a moment ago, there are many such cases. The criteria the commission seems to have applied in drawing the new boundaries have not been respected in my county. Maybe I am unlucky, but that is a fact!

Then, as for accessibility, is it right that the boundary of a riding run through a neighbouring riding? Is it right to create some kind of doughnut hole in the middle of a federal riding? I do not think so. Has anyone stopped for five minutes to consider whether in terms of geography and accessibility this was viable for taxpayers? I think no one considered that kind of concern for very long.

There are also other criteria that could be examined, but this is not the place to do it. In my capacity as member for Berthier—Montcalm, I intend to submit a brief if the issue is not settled in the House by April 20. Mr. Speaker, any member who wants to represent his riding, as is his duty, should listen to his constituents. But when you want to get things done, it is much better to deal with one member instead of two as the reeve of the D'Autray RCM said. That makes perfect sense and everybody in this House would agree that this should be a consideration.

It is not just a matter of drawing boundaries on a map. The whole context should be examined and consultation should take place before any proposal is made. People should be involved instead of being presented with a fait accompli. We should be listening to the wishes of the people and try to reconcile contradictory views and ideas that do not quite fit. Most of all, we should avoid the traditional practice of forcing new ridings on people.

During the last election campaign, I realized much to my surprise that constituents in the Montcalm area of my riding did not know they were part of the riding of Berthier—Montcalm. They all thought they were part of the Joliette riding and were wondering what I was doing there. Most likely, they did not see much of their former member. True, he needed two terms to get

to know the extent of his own riding, so it is easy to understand the confusion the constituents were in.

Mr. Speaker, you will have concluded by now that I oppose the amendment since much more than 24 months would be necessary to correct all those deficiencies. And two years is not that long, after all. Canada may then have only 220 ridings to readjust so that there will be savings there for everybody.

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly): Mr. Speaker, my friend and colleague, the member for Shefford, talked about my riding, Chambly, a little while ago. Two weeks ago, before the Easter recess, I said in this House that I did not understand why a number of voters of my colleague's riding were transferred to mine, and why the population of my riding increased from 75,000 to 110,000 while the population of his riding decreased from 110,000 to 75,000. I still do not understand.

As my friend from the Reform Party said, are we proceeding with this readjustment simply because the act says that we have to do it every ten years? Are we doing this for the fun of it, because the act says we have to do it once every ten years, without asking ourselves if it is appropriate, if it is good or not? That is not important, just do it.

(1200)

The member for Maskinongé—Montcalm just said that his new riding will be full of holes. On the South Shore of Montreal, and I assume no one did it on purpose, this electoral redistribution, by a curious coincidence, will result in the Liberal party standing to gain another riding in the next election because on the South Shore or in the Eastern Townships the riding of Saint-Lambert will have a strong contingent of new Canadians. But I assume that is only a coincidence and not a calculated Machiavellian act.

All of us in this House, like the member for Beauséjour, who is always flashing that smile that we all like, or like the members of the Reform Party, did not suddenly become members of Parliament. Before being elected to this House, you must work a long time, get involved in your riding, and meet your constituents. You know, it could be that our door-to-door campaign for the last election was only the end of a cycle. But I am sure that the member for Beauséjour and all the other members of this House have spent many years—10 or 15 years or more—criss-crossing their ridings and meeting disadvantaged groups, social groups, unions, employers in some cases, fishermen for people in the maritimes.

We did not become members of Parliament by chance. We were chosen, elected and sent here by the people. And by constantly rubbing shoulders with these people, which frequently happens almost instinctively, the members here present have embraced or somewhat adopted their constituents' philosophy, so they generally come here with a precise idea of the philosophy or opinion or direction that they convey in their respective

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riding. Making an electoral division just because the Elections Act says it has to be done every ten years seems to ignore that aspect of the job of a member of Parliament.

In my case, for example, I will be called to represent between 30,000 and 35,000 new constituents, whom I do not know, in municipalities—I heard earlier my colleague in front of me mention municipalities like Béthanie and so on—where I never set foot in my life. And overnight, I will have to represent these people. There are group dynamics emerging in our society. People get used to living together, they arrive at a consensus and convey it to their member of Parliament if he or she has not already perceived it naturally.

In my case, I am afraid that I do not know what people whom I do not know might want. And if we are to simply change numbers, I am sure that my colleague from Shefford would be a much better representative of these people than I, because I simply do not know these municipalities, these RCMs, these potential constituents.

Of course, the Bloc Québécois will make it its duty to represent everybody in Quebec. But the fact remains that for specific or particular aspects, the member for Shefford, who is already there, would certainly do a better job than I, because of the group dynamics and the thinking of people in these regions. He would be able to pinpoint what should be done in that riding, whereas for me, as a new member to these people, by the time I go around and get acquainted with everybody's problems, by the time I get to know their municipalities and the problems of these municipalities and these RCMs, I am afraid these people will suffer the consequences. Therefore, I do not agree with the argument that democracy requires that the electoral boundaries be readjusted every ten years, no matter what comes out of the process.

(1205)

The county of Chambly which I represent and which has about 75,000 constituents is relatively dense. Mr. Speaker, you said earlier that you travel a lot, especially in the county of Shefford. Unfortunately, I never had the pleasure to see you in the county of Chambly, but I hope that you went through it. If not, I invite you to visit it.

The Richelieu River runs right through my county from one end to the other. My county is the heartland of the Patriots. Therefore, I am not the first independentist mentioned in the House of Commons. Incidentally, I was informed recently that five independentists from Beloeil had lost their lives during the battle of the Patriots, in 1837. These people, some Préfontaines and some Lafrances from Beloeil, are from my county. The reason I mention the period of 1837 is because these people live together and know each other. They were builders. They built bridges on the famous Richelieu river. They built churches, they built their parish. These people are used to living together. There

is a spirit of community among the residents of a same region. It is an unwritten tradition, but it exists all the same.

When you add 35,000 new electors whom he does not know to an MP, you distort the group dynamics, to the detriment not of the MP or the federal government, but of the constituents concerned. Now if you want to talk about more practical things, take telephone communications.

In my riding, things are not as bad. From one end of my riding to the other, people cannot call one another direct and have to make a long-distance call. As far as I am concerned, as a member of Parliament, if I want to be able to serve my constituents and be available, I have my office in the middle of the riding where I can call everywhere without high charges to my government, meaning the taxpayers. Also, my constituents can call me from anywhere in the riding without having to pay long-distance bills. For some people, specifically older people, long-distance charges are significant and unforeseen expenses, particularly when they have to speak to their elected representative, which can penalize them.

So imagine the surprise when I was told that people in my riding would have to constantly use Bell Canada long-distance service in order to communicate with their elected representative. That could be very expensive for them. You could argue that it is only a small technical problem. But when we are talking about the representation of members of Parliament, there is a risk in doing that, because we could become less and less representative through such occurrences. This redistribution of the electoral map could prevent members of Parliament from doing their job. This is my first concern.

[English]

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in this House to speak in favour of the motions that the Reform Party has placed before all members of this House today. I do this because I feel so strongly that we need changes in government. We need changes in the way we have been operating.

These amendments to this motion would limit the delay to 12 months on this process and would formally keep the commissioners who are already in place. I am very strongly in favour of those motions. Of course my preference and the preference of all members of the Reform Party would be that Bill C-18 not proceed at all.

I am an ordinary Canadian, an ordinary person. I have serious concerns about the things that have been happening in this country such as the way our country has been run, the enormous deficit and debt that all Canadians face, and unemployment. One of the biggest items that every member in this House heard people speak about during the election campaign was that Canadians wanted more accountability. That is worth repeating. The Canadian people demanded more accountability from their

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elected representatives during this last election. They demand it now and they want to see it.

(1210)

This is a sad, sad day for ordinary Canadians, for ordinary people. What has happened here is that the government members opposite are trying to ram through something that takes away a process that the ordinary people in this country can get involved in. They can make their presentations and recommendations to a body that has been set up for redistribution of electoral boundaries. It is a sad day and I urge everyone in this House to think about that. People want more involvement in government and the government is taking that away from them.

This bill sends a message loud and clear that the government and members opposite and some members on this side do not believe that people should be more involved in what happens in the process. They do not believe that what happens in this House should be a part of what the people of Canada are thinking.

I spent some time in the last two weeks in my riding. I heard of major concerns throughout the riding about the way the redistribution was laid out. We would be losing two communities in my riding which have a strong economic tie to the rest of the region of Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt which I represent. Merritt and Princeton would become separated from that riding and would join Coquihalla riding, a new riding that would be established in B.C.

I had a meeting with the mayor and council of Merritt while I was there last week. They want to make their presentation. They want to go to the commission. They want to submit a presentation on behalf of the people of Merritt. That sounds like a good idea. It sounds like a way for all people to get involved if they have concerns. It is not up to us in this House to draw the boundaries, to draw the lines.

The reason this whole process was established was so that politicians would not be able to tamper or tinker with the drawings of electoral boundaries.

I have had the opportunity to speak to many of my friends across the way in conversations over coffee and sometimes just in the hallways or on the bus from the Confederation Building to here. I have heard from them the underlying reason for trying to stop the redistribution process. They know it is taking away some Liberal stronghold areas. There is no other reason. They are tampering in a process that was set up so that the government and members of Parliament could not tamper with it.

It is unacceptable that this is going on. Possibly, as one other member of the Reform Party has already indicated, this is even unconstitutional. It is a sad day for Canadians. It is a sad day for all of us.

There has been a lot of talk about the cost of this process. Let us take a look at the costs. It budgeted \$8 million for this process. So far there has been \$4 million to \$5 million spent. I thought it was \$5 million but this morning I heard that maybe it was only \$4 million. It seems that the government is not quite sure how much it actually spent to date on this process. Anyway it is in the area of \$4 million to \$5 million.

It wants to scrap the whole process. It wants to put everything on hold so that in 24 months it can spend another \$8 million to \$10 million and restart the whole thing. Is that in the interests of the Canadian people?

(1215)

Do members opposite believe that Canadians will stand by when the country is facing a massive deficit and debt and place before them another \$8 million to \$10 million bill when it is not necessary? We could simply put the process on hold for a 12 month period, have a committee study it if they wish, as our amendments suggest, and then Canadians can get value for their dollar, something that they are not doing by eliminating this redistribution process.

Would it not be worth mentioning that we are kind of crowded in this House? We are at the maximum probably in seating without major adjustments to this place. I received a letter yesterday from a constituent who said we should look at capping the number of members in the House of Commons. That is a good idea and I think we should look at it.

People are tired. We have too much government. It is a good idea. Absolutely we should do that. He also suggested we should reduce the number of seats. I think we should reduce the numbers on that side of the House, but maybe strengthen them over here.

What we should be looking at is Senate reform. The west, the northern regions, the Atlantic provinces want accountability too. If we limit the number of seats in the House, then we have to look at strengthening the other place, the Senate chamber. It is something that requires serious consideration.

This whole process, as I said earlier, should have Canadians wondering what the government is all about. Does it really mean that it wants the people involved in government, because it is stifling that by stopping this right now? It is stifling the process for the people of Canada so they cannot make their representations, their concerns and their presentations to these commissions. The commissions were set up independently so government could not be involved and would be at arm's length from the whole process. That is the way it should be.

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I have serious concerns about my riding but I am willing to make presentations on behalf of the people of Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt regarding those concerns. I will not have that opportunity now and the people of Canada do not have the opportunity to do it either.

In closing, I would like to urge all members in every corner of the House to please consider once again what Canadians have asked us to do, to bring accountability back to the House of Commons and to let them be more involved in the democracy process. I want every member of the House consider that. I ask hon. members to support the amendments that are before us today.

Mrs. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph—Wellington): Mr. Speaker, to my hon. colleague across the way, first he mentioned the fact that it is more costly. There is no issue here. The reality is if we proceed—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I wonder if I might seek clarification from the member? Is she on debate? There is no questions or comments period in the standing orders we are presently under. Is the member on debate?

Mrs. Chamberlain: Yes, I am, Mr. Speaker. Could I ask the Chair a question? When you say am I on debate, what exactly is it that you would like for me to do?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I do not want to put any restrictions on any member, but according to the standing orders of this debate at this time, each member who seeks the floor is recognized by the Chair and has 10 minutes to make his or her intervention.

I wondered if perhaps the member was seeking to ask a question of the member who last spoke. There is no questions or comments period following the interventions at this particular stage of debate. The hon. member for Guelph—Wellington.

Mrs. Chamberlain: Mr. Speaker, the member across the way said that this is a costly process, and this side of the House quite agrees with that. People in general and certainly in my riding of Guelph—Wellington have expressed deep concern at the cost of the process and how much will be gained.

(1220)

The other issue that the member across the floor has talked about is the fact that this would create more government. For us to create more government at a time that people feel we should not be moving in that direction is not responsible.

I do not believe we are taking the position—I certainly am not—that we do not think people should be involved. People should be involved. People have been involved at the local level from riding to riding. Many people have talked to me on this issue and expressed concern. They wished that the government

would take a leadership role in deciding what should happen with this issue. We have attempted to do that.

I believe my role when I was elected was to be a leader, to show leadership and to make decisions supported by concrete facts, information building, public information being included in that communication process. I am comfortable with the direction the government is moving in.

The charge by my hon. colleague about Liberal stronghold areas being protected is not so. I cannot agree with that. That would not be the reason I would look at not supporting this amendment. The reality is that many members—I would put myself in this category—find themselves living outside the actual area that they represent. It seems odd to me that there would be decisions and directions moved in this manner.

Another colleague of ours finds part of his farm in one riding and his house in another. This does not seem reasonable. I hope the member across the way knows that some of the boundaries that were proposed are not credible. They do not make sense.

To have a situation in which we would have public input on every single area, 295 ridings or perhaps more—my colleague talks about maybe 300 or 304 ridings, I do not know where this process would end—is not a good thing at this time. The points of view are varied but in general there is wide support for the government.

I will speak on behalf of Guelph—Wellington and the information that I have received from my constituents. It is that this process, the way it was first initiated, was quite a hodge-podge. They are comfortable with us as a government saying no to this process in the manner that it has been proposed. They are concerned about cost and they are concerned about more government.

My colleague has indicated that is the question. That would be the result of the process we are embarked upon at this time. I would say this to members. From my point of view and from what I have been able to gather from public input, from talking to people, they are comfortable with this decision.

This is exactly what the Reform Party wants us to do, listen to our constituents and find out what they truly want us to do. In acting on that I am comfortable on this topic at this time.

(1225)

[Translation]

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides): Mr. Speaker, I am convinced I will not have to invite you to come and visit my riding since you must have been there already on skiing vacations. The riding of Laurentides has 43 municipalities and 110,000 voters. It is a huge riding but the new electoral map brings appalling cuts to this area. Without any reason, several municipalities will be taken from my riding and will become part of a neighbouring one.

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You must understand that the riding of Laurentides is located along a highway, highway 15 or 117. It is a network, a tourist region and it is therefore very important that the area be maintained as a whole and remain united. If you take municipalities out of a tourist network, it becomes very difficult for those municipalities to make a name for themselves in another riding which may be, for instance, agricultural or something else.

I would like to tell you about municipalities that are very disturbed by the new electoral map and which approached me and explained their problem. You have Mont-Tremblant which is booming and must count on the touristic network of my riding to be able to advertise and attract tourists. If Mont-Tremblant became part of Berthier—Montcalm, which is a totally different kind of riding, the people of Berthier—Montcalm would be hard pressed when it comes to the economic development of Mont-Tremblant. Furthermore, they object to Mont-Tremblant being taken out of my riding.

The town of Saint-Jovite along highway 117 and all those towns to the north, including Labelle, which are part of the tourism network, are being removed and added to Argenteuil—Papineau, which has an entirely different focus. So, of course, the mayors, the councillors and my constituents called and said: What can we do? We do not want to leave the riding of Laurentides. We feel at home here. We do not want to be part of another riding where they may be too busy to look after us, because it takes a long time to cover the whole riding. I have a very big riding with a lot of constituents, and it takes a lot of travelling, but we have a network where everything connects. In fact, we used to have the “petit train du Nord”, a train that went through all the municipalities now in my riding. Where the train used to run has now been turned into parkland.

If part of this tourism network is removed and added to another riding which is different again, it will make the park far less attractive because the park needs the Laurentides Tourism Association and the services in my riding to develop as it should.

I am against the amendment, and I think the readjustment process was a hasty affair. They took a map and looked at the number of constituents in a given riding. They decided there should be 75,000 inhabitants per riding, so they take this particular part out and add it on somewhere else. Some ridings have a lot of small municipalities with very few people, but the member may end up with 70 municipalities in the same riding. This does not make sense. A member can never do a good job under those circumstances. To do a good job, the redistribution process must be reasonable. There should also be a good infrastructure.

I know some people in my riding who told me during the election campaign: So I am in Laurentides? I said yes, you belong to the riding of Laurentides. They were not aware of this.

(1230)

It takes a few years for people to get used to belonging to a riding or to identify with the riding. Shifting people from one riding to the next every eight years does not create a sense of community.

I am also against reducing the number of members, because we already have 110,000 constituents and if we get more, I am going to have trouble looking after everyone. It already takes two and a half hours to drive across the riding. It takes me longer to drive from one end of the riding to the other than it takes to drive to Ottawa. These are huge distances.

The tourism network is in good shape, and people want to stay in that network. I will keep doing my job in my riding. I think it is very important for people to identify with a region. I think it is very important for a region's development. I intend to go on working with my constituents, and if these electoral boundaries have to be changed, the municipalities concerned and I—in fact, I would lose a large number of municipalities which have already been identified—will take steps to prepare a brief and protest against changes that make no sense at all in a region where municipalities need each other to survive.

You know that when people go to Saint-Sauveur, they will also visit another municipality next door. They will see a show in Val-David and have dinner in Sainte-Agathe or go boating there. In this region, we all have to help each other. Otherwise, if you take a few small municipalities and destroy their tourism network or move it somewhere else, you lose the dynamics that tourism needs, because this is not an easy sector.

I will go on doing my job in my beautiful riding of Laurentides, and as far as breaking up the riding is concerned, I will do my utmost to keep that from happening.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I would not want the member for Shefford to be jealous, but I have to say I spent even more time in the Laurentians.

The member for Richelieu.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu): Mr. Speaker, I almost feel I have to begin my speech by inviting you to come and visit my riding. Even though it has already been said, it is one of the most beautiful in Canada. I think that it comes second after yours, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I will be allowed one more minute for having said that.

The debate on this bill brings me to make some comments that might differ a little bit from the other comments that were made. First, in terms of the relevance of the legislation, it is surprising

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to see a government reject a change based on the principle of a better redistribution of ridings on the basis of population.

The proposed reform, after several years of extensive debate and reflection, to allow the representation in the House of Commons to be directly related to the population of a riding, while also taking into account the sense of belonging to a region, while taking into account, for instance, the principle of the regional county municipalities in Quebec, the principle also of the economic relations that can be established in various regions—of course that will and desire of the House and all Quebecers and Canadians was extremely valid. However, basically, if we really wanted a reform, would we start with that kind of redistribution? We would probably start by asking ourselves what our institutions represent and how useful they are.

(1235)

Based on that, the first reform would be to ask if we have one House too many. Do we Quebecers and Canadians still need two Houses? One is commonly called the Senate but in the parliamentary language of the House of Commons we call it "the other House". Do we still need that other House? That would be the first point to consider.

Then we will talk about the distribution and number of ridings, how many people should be represented by a member of Parliament and so on. Ultimately, many Quebecers and, I am sure, many Canadians want the other House to be abolished.

By attacking the other House, I do not want to attack the venerable people who sit there; we know that there are some very competent individuals. Of course, there are also some bagmen for the big parties such as Mr. Rizzuto for the Liberals and Mr. Nolin for the Conservative Party. They were appointed to their position and they are well-paid party workers who raise funds for the old parties.

But except for these few cases, let us admit that there are some really capable people who should run for election to this House to make their contribution instead of going to that big dormitory, which sometimes becomes a nursery school, as we saw in some debates. But of what use is that big dormitory to which those hon. sleepyheads go? That is the real question.

If we talked about reform by first dealing with the usefulness of the other House, we would realize that the members of that body have knowledge and skills which would be much more useful to the community in this House here. In fact, that other House is a sort of relic of colonialism, meant to protect the interests of the wealthy and to cool the ardour of the people's representatives. That is why one of the requirements to sit in the other House was to have property worth at least \$15,000. That requirement still exists, although it is meaningless today, but back then it was a lot. Therefore it was a House to protect the

wealthy from some legislation that could have threatened their wealth or economic power.

Over time, the situation evolved. That other House became the defender of the regions. That is why we often heard about the importance of the second Chamber in western Canada, for example, because that House in a sense embodied the regions. Historically, that House had a certain role to play as a defender of the regions; that was acceptable too.

But now, people band together in associations, unions, environmental groups and all kinds of organizations. They have means to make their demands heard and associations to represent them directly to elected officials and they no longer feel a need to have that House to defend them. That House has become so useless that the time has come for us to think about whether it should even exist. Those associations no longer go through the other place. In fact, I wonder how many could answer if I were to ask all the hon. members here the name of the senator representing them in their regions. In my region of Sorel for example, what is the name of our senator? I am involved in politics myself, yet I do not know. If I, as a politician, do not know who my senator is, you can imagine that he must not be getting much mail or too many calls. There are even senators who refuse to give out their fax numbers. I found that out when some of my constituents said: "Maybe we could stop that unemployment insurance bill from going through in the Senate; give us the fax number." So, I phoned around and, as it turned out, almost half of the senators I phoned refused to give out their fax numbers; they did not want to be disturbed. It is incredible, but true.

(1240)

My point is that the upper house has lost its *raison d'être*, and that may be where reform should start. Let us start by reviewing the need for our institutions. Based on that review, we will be able to say: "The other place no longer meets our needs; it must be abolished." That would mean \$40 million, \$60 million or \$70 million less to collect from the taxpayers. Furthermore, the senators' expertise could be put to good use elsewhere. They are obviously committed to politics if they agreed to sit in the other place. So, we are telling them: "Get elected democratically and come and sit with us in the House of Commons. Find a seat. Get the people's seal of approval."

This leads to the next question. Are there enough members in this House or too many? As far as I am concerned, the answer rests in the comparison between Canada and other democratic nations, preferably North American democratic nations.

Let us take the United States as an example. They have a legislative body, the members of which are not called members of Parliament, but congressmen. If I recall correctly, there are some 450 of them representing 250 million people, while we are 295 for a population of 25 million. If the United States were to have as many congressmen as we have members of Parliament in Canada, they would need 2,950 seats in the Congress. Their

population being 10 times ours, they would have ten times more members of Parliament than we do, relatively speaking. Obviously, something is wrong.

Do you think it is right for a small province like Prince Edward Island, a province no bigger than my riding, to have 32 MLAs, four federal MPs, one representative of the Queen, one lieutenant governor and even, at times, one Supreme Court judge? Obviously, something is wrong. And that is the true reform which should take place.

Abolish the other place and reduce the number of MPs. Do not increase their number, reduce it. If there were 150 of us here, it would be more than enough, because what is the role of MPs once they have been elected, especially government members? They do nothing but vote according to the whip's instructions. They are like sheep. The best example is the one provided by the member opposite who is looking at me with a smile. These people roared like big cats when they formed the opposition, but have now become sheep or paper tigers with no role to play. They simply sit and when the bells ring they come and vote like sheep. They do not even ask themselves whether they should have been consulted. They are not consulted at all.

If there were 150 MPs, or half the current number, perhaps the debates would be more democratic, with a greater participation. This is what reform should be all about. A reform should first look at the institutions and their relevancy. Then, there should be a second debate on the number of MPs, followed by a third one on the role of the member of Parliament. It goes without saying that the MP's role is to represent his or her riding, to act as ombudsman and protector of the individual who has a problem with UI, the company which did not get a subsidy, or the person or organization who made representations and did not get an answer from a minister or the government. The MP is also a legislator, but that is unfortunately the role which is most neglected. In my next speech, I would like to elaborate on this extremely important role of legislator which MPs should have but do not have right now in our institutions as they currently exist.

(1245)

[English]

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to respond to some of the remarks—

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not think that we have a quorum.

Some hon. members: Quorum.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I will ask the clerk to count the members present.

And the count having been taken:

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): We have a quorum. Resuming debate.

Mr. Scott (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, before I talk on Bill C-18, I would like to respond to some of the remarks made by my friend from the Bloc who spoke before me. He mentioned the other place and suggested that we should do away with it. He said there was a growing mood in Canada for abolishing the Senate.

I would like to address that and say that the reason the other place has no credibility right now is that it is not elected and it is not accountable.

I suggest it is essential for the future of Canada and for regional fairness that we have a strong and vibrant Senate. Our vision is that senators should be elected and be accountable and there should be regional fairness in their distribution.

Going to Bill C-18, I have spoken on this issue before. I have to say we are very much opposed to this bill because it smacks of political interference.

It is very clear from the news reports I read in British Columbia while I was there for the recent hiatus that people in that province are deeply concerned that what we have here is business as usual. We have politicians who when they do not like something, instead of going through due process and allowing a fair and unbiased process to proceed, want to get involved by commandeering that process and steering it in a direction that is favourable to them.

Furthermore there is a good deal of concern among taxpayers that we have \$5 million invested in this process right now and we are in danger of losing that. As a matter of fact we will lose the value of that money if this process is indeed suspended for 24 months and the commissions are abolished.

At the same time the government talks about a commitment to capping the number of MPs it attacks us on these benches for not wanting to see this happen. We have asked time and again and have moved an amendment to say if you want our support on a motion then instead of saying you are going to review the number of MPs, cap the number of MPs, make a firm commitment to it. There is no commitment in Bill C-18 to do this.

I find it very difficult to support a motion which we only look at reviewing the number of MPs, only look at studying something. If we do not think it is right then we should make a commitment up front that we are going to come up with a formula for capping the number of MPs.

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I think the government would find a good deal of support from this side of the House, possibly unanimous support, if it moved in that direction but we have not seen that. I was in my riding recently, as were most members. I received very little expression of concern from my constituents on the matter of electoral boundary changes. Believe me, my riding changes dramatically, maybe not as dramatically as some of the other people in this House but it does change dramatically. It increases by about 25 per cent. I already have one of the largest geographic ridings in Canada. It is very difficult for a member to service now and it is going to become even more difficult under the proposed changes to the electoral boundaries commission.

(1250)

However, there is a process in place and the people in my constituency are prepared to live with that process. They are prepared to work within it. I believe that should be the position that all of us take as members in this House, that rather than trying to hijack the process we work within it.

Because the process will be suspended for 24 months if this bill passes, British Columbia and Ontario will go into the next century, indeed the next millennium, with the same electoral boundaries and the same distribution they had based on the 1980 census. If there is one thing that generates a good deal of concern and anger in British Columbia, and I am sure that Ontario feels the same way, it is the fact that we are being short-changed. We are not receiving a proper representation based on our population, which is something our democracy ascribes to. I have been hearing a lot from my constituents on that.

Let me suggest that the government proceeds with this bill at its political peril in British Columbia and in other parts of Canada as well. If the country goes into another election without redistribution having taken place, there will be a price to pay and the government should be aware of that. There is a strong feeling and strong sentiment in British Columbia that that is the case. People are not happy with that.

If the government wants to introduce Bill C-18 and wants to have an opportunity to examine the process, why not do it in 12 months? Certainly anything that can be done in 24 months can be done in 12 months. We do not see a reason for holding up the process any longer than is necessary. Furthermore we do not see a requirement to suspend or to abolish the present commissions and come up with new commissions 24 months from now and start all over at square one. Why not at least retain some of the value of the dollars that have been spent?

I support the Reform amendments for those reasons.

I feel very strongly that the government should make a statement that it is going to cap the number of seats rather than just talk about reviewing the number of seats. We have to put a firm cap on the number of seats. We have to show Canadians that we are indeed concerned about the expenditure of taxpayers' dollars. We certainly do not need more representatives in this House than we have now to oversee the affairs of the country.

We want to retain the current commissions and preserve the value of the work that has been done. This can be done and still allow the government the opportunity to review the work of the electoral boundaries commissions and to review the process that is in place. I support very strongly that if we suspend the process we only suspend it for 12 months and not 24 months.

We must keep the process scrupulously non-partisan and non-political. We must do it in a way that Canadians can see that we have not engaged in political interference, that it is not business as usual, that we have not looked at trying to further or protect our own political interests, but looked at the best way to achieve redistribution and electoral boundaries changes based on what is best for the country.

(1255)

We must ensure that representation by population is observed in the next election. As I said earlier, the government is going to have a very heavy political price to pay if it does not follow that. I reiterate again that British Columbians are very unhappy. They will be very unhappy if they go into an election in 1996, 1997, 1998 or whenever it happens with the same boundaries that they have had based on the census of 1980.

B.C. and Ontario deserve nothing less than a fair shake as do all of the provinces when it comes to distribution. We must continue to subscribe to representation by population. This bill flies in the face of that and will put British Columbia and Ontario at a disadvantage in the next election.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few minutes to respond to some of the things that I have been hearing over recent minutes and hours when I see the opposition delaying this bill today.

There is some irony here. People are saying in this House: "This bill is going to delay the process by 24 months. We are against delay", but they are delaying the bill, ensuring that the 24 months will happen later had they not delayed the bill to start with. Maybe that needs to be said.

What about the fact that the Reform Party wanted this delay to be 24 months when the government initially asked for 18 months? Whose fault is that? Could it be that there is a little duplicity going on, that we are not hearing the facts exactly as they are?

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We heard in the speech today that the electors of the hon. member's province are going to be unhappy if the redistribution as presently planned does not take place. Mr. Speaker, I am sure with your being a fond reader of the *Globe and Mail* you will know of the story of some weeks ago which outlined perfectly well how B.C. and Ontario were being short—changed by the redistribution that is going to take place now unless we amend it, that true rep by pop does not exist in Canada at the present time, that it should be restored, that the whole debate about that needs to take place and the process we have now has been there for 30 or 40 years unamended. What about the 1986 amendment that was done by the Conservative government? That amendment made it such that no province should lose seats even if it loses population.

Which provinces are the victims of that? B.C. and Ontario are, and that is the process that the member wants us to proceed with. Then he says to top it all off that we need to elect our senators. This is coming from a bunch of people who voted against the Charlottetown accord and who campaigned against it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I fail to see the logic in the hon. member telling us that the 24 month suspension is unacceptable, when in fact he himself, or at least his party, requested it. We proposed a period of 18 months, and now he wants to reduce this to 12. Well, what is it going to be? Make up your mind. What do you want? Twelve, eighteen or twenty-four months? Convene a caucus meeting, discuss the dress code?

[*English*]

Discuss suits. Do something. Discuss it privately and then come back to the House and make up your mind whether it is 12, 18 or 24 that members want I say to my colleagues across the way. We need to review this whole system of redistribution. At second reading the Bloc members across the way voted in favour of the bill if I remember correctly.

Of course they are filibustering a little bit today, but perhaps that will change over the next few minutes or at least we are hoping. If we are serious about not wanting any more delay let the bill proceed so that we can go ahead with this review. If we are serious about not having unnecessary delay, I say to the Reform Party that it cannot have it both ways. It cannot ask to lengthen the delay and say that it is against the delay after it did just that. I say that to the members across the way.

(1300)

Members must realize that the redistribution as presently planned in the law is most unfair to British Columbia and Ontario according to all independent observers. Rep by pop exists the least in those two provinces because of the structure

there now and in particular as a result of the 1976 amendment proposed with the previous government that made it such that no province lost seats.

I call upon my colleagues, if they are serious, forthright and honest about wanting no delay, to proceed with the bill. Let us get the process started. Let us do things and let us do them quickly so that we can have good and proper redistribution to give fair representation to all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maurice Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead):

Mr. Speaker, following up on what my hon. colleague from Richelieu just said, I would like to participate in this debate and speak about institutions. Not the kind of institution he referred to, namely the other House, the Senate, or the House of Commons, but existing institutions that ensure the development of our local communities. I am referring here to the riding, an institution in itself.

I would also like to say a few words about RCMs, an institution which took root in Quebec in the mid seventies, and about economic development institutions which have a considerable impact on each of our ridings. Of course, I will tie all of this in with the electoral boundaries reform process.

In principle, everyone agree that the objective must be greater equity in the allocation of the number of voters by riding so as to ensure that one riding does not carry more weight than another. Obviously, everyone works toward the attainment of this objective. When the time comes to undertake the process, specific guidelines and criteria must be followed. Above all, demographic measurements must not be the sole consideration. The criteria must reflect the makeup of our communities and respect the will of the people.

Over the past 20 or 25 years in Quebec, a sense of attachment has emerged as a result of a process which was and still is known as joint action. I recall taking part in the early 1970s in the Lac Mégantic region in consultations carried out by the regional development council of the eastern townships. This was the start of the process of pooling the needs of the entire population of the eastern townships. This sense of regional attachment which I alluded to earlier developed over a period of many years and led to tremendous economic and social development over a period of some years.

The process was further cemented by the establishment of regional county municipalities in the mid seventies, as I mentioned. The first task undertaken by the RCMs was to put on the table a development plan to be voted on by all elected officials in a given region or sub-region. In the development plan, the municipalities in each sub-region specified what kind of

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community facility they needed and where these facilities would be located.

Subsequently, a complete network of economic institutions and industrial commissions was developed. These operated in various fields, not just in the industrial sector, but in the business and community sectors as well. As a result, our various regions, and I refer more specifically to the eastern townships, developed their own personality and were at last in a position to convince the authorities that economic and social development should be adapted to their needs and the needs of people who live there. When the time comes to readjust the boundaries of electoral districts, these boundaries must take into account a process that has evolved during the past twenty or so years.

(1305)

The proposed changes, as I said earlier, will have a disastrous impact on much of my riding, especially on the Granit RCM located in the beautiful Lake Mégantic area, which I am sure you will visit one of these days, Mr. Speaker, since I understand you are a fan of Quebec.

The Granit RCM has always been part of the Eastern Townships. In fact, as I said earlier, about 25 years ago I was involved in the consultation process to set up regional development councils. The Lake Mégantic region was part of the economic and social development process in the eastern townships and established contacts with most of the authorities involved, including not only local and regional authorities but also authorities at the provincial and federal levels. Mr. Speaker, you have been in government for a number of years, as I have, and you know it is not easy for the average citizen to find his way through the maze of institutions and governments.

When people have had a development model for a number of years, they are very concerned about the consequences of getting rid of this model overnight. And that is exactly what will happen as a result of boundary changes in this particular part of my riding. The Lake Mégantic region would be added to the riding that includes the Thetford mines region, the centre for asbestos, and thus included in the economic region of Quebec City, which is a very nice area, I will grant you that. Just because we want to stay in the Eastern Townships does not mean we have anything against people in another riding.

I think it should be obvious to anyone who is the least bit involved in this process that people should be consulted on any changes being planned.

I heard the hon. member for the Reform Party say earlier that it was necessary for the electoral boundaries readjustment process to be politically neutral. I disagree. Since we are elected representatives and the people have given us a mandate, it is our responsibility and in fact our duty to be involved in any process that would affect the future of our constituents. If I am not mistaken, two-thirds of the members of this House—more than 200 came here for the first time five or six months ago. My point is that most members of this House are serving their first term.

This means that during the past few months they attended many meetings and read all kinds of documentation to get to know their riding, their region, their constituents and the needs of these constituents. They must be involved in these consultations. And we cannot do this in a hurry. We need enough time.

(1310)

In my own riding, I have started consulting the municipalities, and I can say that with 67 municipalities—yes, 67—it takes weeks before we can get a clear picture of what people want. We need time to consult our constituents and ensure that any changes that are made will reflect the institutions in place.

Mr. Michel Daviault (Ahuntsic): Mr. Speaker, this is the second time I rise on electoral reform. First I would like to apologize to our friends the interpreters for not bringing them my speech, as I usually do. Unfortunately, if the people listening to us could see the wilderness in which we are preaching today, they would understand that sometimes we must be ready to respond quickly.

So this is the second time I rise on electoral reform. I did so as chairman of the Montreal Island caucus. I questioned my Bloc colleagues and tried to gather information on this reform, and today we are discussing the amendments proposed after the report was tabled. The main amendment—the first one—would reduce from 24 to 12 months the suspension period for electoral boundary readjustment. The second and third amendments are a logical consequence of the first one and would let the readjustment proceed while the committee drafts its report so that the commission can do its job.

When I spoke—I will come back to my first speech on this—it was important to me, and many of my regional colleagues spoke of the importance of representing the socio-economic, socio-political communities in their ridings; in the regions, they talk a lot about regional county municipalities, while in the Montreal area, they talk about districts. It is important for members to represent these communities, to have a political representation as integrated as possible at the provincial, federal, municipal, or school level.

In fact, I think that when we talk about the opportunity for politicians to act with the increasingly scarce or limited resources at their disposal, such actions must be better co-ordinated at every level of government. In this respect, there are administrative units that must be represented.

In my first speech I spoke about a fuzzy mathematical logic because, in my opinion, the proposed reform has nothing to do with real life. I told you about problems in the eastern part of Montreal, in Mercier, Hochelaga—Maisonnette, Papineau—Saint-Michel, the riding of the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, that will disappear, the riding of Saint-Léonard that will expand considerably, as well as the riding of Saint-Denis and my own riding of Ahuntsic. By the way, “Ahuntsic” is an Indian word that dates back to the beginning of the colony. Mr. Ahuntsic was a young ferryman with the first settlers and it is

the Iroquois who gave him this nickname. So, that name goes back to the very beginning of the colony.

(1315)

I re-examined the map and discovered another problem with the riding of Bourassa—Anjou—Rivières—des—Prairies, which seems to me quite significant when you consider only the figures.

The riding of Bourassa encompasses the city of Montreal North, a developing area facing hard times and trying to regroup its community organizations as well as its political demography. The area is pretty well integrated.

Given the proposed readjustments, from a mathematical point of view only, we will add to this riding, which encompasses a whole city, about ten streets taken from the riding of Anjou—Rivières—des—Prairies. Now, Rivières—des—Prairies is a neighbourhood in the city of Montreal. In other words, we will be adding to a politically and economically homogenous entity a tiny area, made up of ten streets, only to respect some mathematical criteria. I will come back later to the spreads, because there are some things which are totally absurd.

I thought I would address the issue of “juggling” figures, and since our friends, the translators, do not have copy of my speech, I am looking forward to seeing how they will translate this nice Quebec French expression, *zigonnage*, which says exactly what I mean.

In my hands, I have a map which I want to show you. I want to talk about the population spreads. In Quebec, there are about 91,500 constituents for every seat and the ridings are drawn according to this average ratio.

If you look at the previous map, in the area of Montreal made up of 23 ridings, 11 ridings were below the average ratio. Now, on the new map, we have 17 ridings which are 5 per cent over the average ratio. So, we went from a minimum scale which we were not following to another scale which we are still not following, since the variations are very large.

In fact, on the former map, the spread was of 20 per cent in three ridings and 10 per cent in four other ridings. With the new map, the spread in 17 ridings on the island of Montreal is over 5 per cent. We even have some pretty obscure spreads, some incredible turnabouts. In Laurier—Sainte—Marie, the spread went from minus 13 to plus 4, for a difference of 17. In Notre—Dame—de—Grâce, we went from minus 14 to plus 10, a difference of 24 between the two maps. In Rosemont, it varied from minus 5 to plus 12, a difference of 17. The two champions in this respect are Anjou—Rivière—des—Prairies, which changes

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from +20 to -0.54, a spread of 21, and the riding of Vaudreuil, which will go from +20 to -8, a spread of 28.

Why do we have these wide swings? I do not know where the riding of Vaudreuil will be on the next maps, because it will no longer be part of Montreal Island.

In my first presentation, I assumed that the riding of NDG no longer existed, which is not the case. NDG is now Lachine—NDG. The riding of Lachine—Lac—Saint—Louis is now Pointe—Claire—Dollard; Pierrefonds—Dollard will be Pierrefonds—Beaconsfield and Saint—Henri—Westmount will be Westmount—Ville—Marie. Ridings that ran east—west will now run north—south, which creates a juxtaposition of small towns on the West Island, which consists of medium—sized towns. It takes two to make a federal riding, but instead of the usual east—west twinning, they now run north—south.

It is rather messy, and I think we are just perpetuating a system that did not make sense to start with. We have had the same system for the past 30 years, and it led to an incongruous situation that to us in Montreal was really incredible, and I am referring to the riding of Laval—des—Rapides which straddled the Rivière—des—Prairies, being half on the Island of Laval and half on Montreal Island. When you realize, as I do, that the people of Ahuntsic often wish the metro would be extended to Laval, so that the people of Laval could leave their cars at home instead of polluting our neighbourhoods, I find it hard to understand why we should group two communities that so often disagree on major political issues.

(1320)

So far, four ridings in the region have not been affected: the three ridings of Laval, where Laval Centre is at +11.52, Laval East at +12 and Laval West at +18. A subsequent readjustment would normally create a fourth riding on the Island of Laval. However, considering existing figures and population growth, we can assume that for the next census, a fourth riding would have to include more than just the north shore, on Île Jésus.

Are we to assume, after seeing what it means to have a riding straddling two islands, that according to the same system, we will get another incongruous situation when the next readjustment creates another riding straddling the shores of two islands?

That sounds rather far—fetched, but in any case, I would like to point out that the riding of Saint—Laurent—Cartierville will not change. This is the only riding out of 23 on the Island that will not be affected in any way. Therefore, if we can presume the member is thinking in electoral terms when she talks about the map, we can certainly presume that our hon. colleague, the Acting Speaker, will have no partisan motivation whatsoever when she votes.

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This brings us to the amendments. I see myself having to defend this in front of the commission simply because we could not meet the deadline, because here in the House we follow a very peculiar kind of procedure to say the least. To the commission I will say: According to the present rules, you should do this for my riding and according to other rules, you should do that.

It is somewhat incongruous when you think that, whatever happens, this whole process will and must disappear because it is not logical for me to defend bits of Montreal districts that will be taken away to be added to another riding for socio-demographic reasons. One thing is sure: if I win, my neighbour will lose; according to demographic and mathematical criteria, someone somewhere has to lose.

On that point, I agree with the bill and I disagree with the amendments because 12 months will not be enough. I agree with the member for Beauséjour that we need 24 months and that, after the committee has tabled its report, we will need time to come back to the question and analyze it thoroughly and not in a rush as I have to do it today; we will need to take the time to study the issue properly.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve): Mr. Speaker, I am a bit surprised. First of all, I would like to invite you to visit the beautiful riding of Hochelaga—Maisonneuve with your wife and children. You know that the Olympic Stadium is in that riding, along with other tourist attractions which you will certainly enjoy.

On a more relevant point, I am quite surprised by the amendment proposed by our friends in the Reform Party. Surprised, because this does not seem consistent with what they were advocating in the past.

(1325)

You cannot say that what is good for the goose is not good for the gander. If one has proposals, a strategy regarding public finances, as they claim to have, I say with due respect that one has to be consistent.

I would like to make two points. The first one is that they are trying, clumsily, to make us believe that there is a crisis, an imminent democratic peril. This rather unsavoury hotchpotch is unfocused. It is presented as if the fact that electoral boundaries will not be revised in the near future is going to deprive Canadians of their right to vote and vitiate the democratic process.

A short while ago, I found rather humorous the reference to fair representation. There was one occasion in the history of this country when fair representation was really threatened, and that was in 1840, at the time of the union of Upper and Lower Canada. One cannot say that by not supporting the amendment proposed by the Reform Party we put democracy in peril.

This is my first point and I find questionable, to say the least, this attempt to take us into a process which may involve the spending of public money. I admit that 40 or 50 years ago, when Canadian and Quebec society was evolving rapidly, readjustment of electoral boundaries had to be done without undue delay. Universal suffrage had to be fully established, since entire sectors of society were still disfranchised. It was also a time when rural life was making way for urban life.

I do not think that, at the present time, we are in a position to use this kind of argument. I think that we can live with a moratorium, provided that it is not forever—nobody wants the status quo to last forever—but we think that in view of our present financial situation and given the current political agenda, there are other priorities and urgent problems the Canadian government should deal with, before we undertake such an exercise.

I could mention some of these problems, as we have done previously. There is of course, among others, the question of unemployment. In terms of a democratic emergency, I am much more concerned about the 50,000 unemployed workers who might be excluded from UI in certain areas of Quebec because of the proposed reform. When it comes to democracy, I am much more concerned by this kind of legislation than by the redrawing of the electoral map.

Speaking of democratic emergency, and I discussed it with colleagues from the Reform Party, I think that the real emergency is to initiate an in-depth review of the subject matter of the Canadian Human Rights Act, which we on this side, together with other Canadian and Quebec groups, have been calling for. That is a real emergency.

If we as parliamentarians and opposition parties are truly concerned about democratic rights, I believe that it is legislation of this kind that we must bring to the attention of the Parliament as a priority.

On the other hand, as the member for Ahuntsic said—you could say he is my neighbour since, in Montreal, we are all more or less neighbours—we have every right to be concerned about the kind of boundaries the commission is proposing. Let us take, for example, the riding of Hochelaga—Maisonneuve which, if we went ahead with the present proposals, would be merged just like that with the town of Saint-Léonard, which is poles apart in social and economic terms.

I do not want to say anything bad about Saint-Léonard because I know that it is a town with many attractive features, a town where things worth mentioning happen. Nevertheless if, as lawmakers, we want to promote coherent environments, I believe that it would be somewhat incongruous to propose the merging of Saint-Léonard with the federal riding of Hochelaga—Maisonneuve which, as everybody knows, is a working-class area proud of its roots, and where 92 per cent of the population is French speaking. They are, as we know, two

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different entities with their own social and economic make-up, and you do not need a Ph.D. in sociology to understand that you cannot ask two dissimilar entities to live in harmony.

(1330)

If you are a member of Parliament and want to speak in public and represent people, you should at least do so with some consistency. That is real democracy. Real democracy means ensuring that the conditions of representation are such that the member can reflect the social and political interests of his constituents, not to engage in a process that would soon lead to some strange situations which my colleagues have not failed to point out. That is why I cannot understand the amendment proposed by the Reform Party.

We also find in other ridings some anomalies like those we could come up with if the revision process were rushed. Not only did they want to combine the city of Saint-Léonard with Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, but they wanted to take from us, to amputate, dare I say castrate, the Angus Shops, a recent residential development which is the middle class of Hochelaga—Maisonneuve and helps us achieve some social balance. The people of the Angus Shops always felt that they belonged to Hochelaga—Maisonneuve and always co-operated in the social and community life of the riding. Redrawing the electoral map could cut them off from the riding of Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

So I think that we must be careful when dealing with questions like that and certainly not create emergencies where they do not exist. I fully realize that it is useful to revise riding boundaries periodically. Yes, things evolve and people move, but I do not think that we should do so now, under the conditions presented to us.

We should ask whether we do not have better things to do as legislators. Could we not find something better to do with our time than to engage in a debate like that? You know how the Bloc Québécois was able to identify, on the basis of Quebec's interests—I see some government members nodding; they agree with the excellent work of the Official Opposition and it is a pleasure to know that we could co-operate with them on things like that—the Bloc Québécois was quick to identify some areas where we think the government must act and make proposals to us, areas which involve the vital democratic interests of Quebecers and Canadians.

I was just talking about the eagerly awaited reform. Many groups in our society long for a reform, which is what Parliament is all about, since it involves the Canadian Human Rights Act. This law was passed in 1977 and has basically never been amended. It is urgent to do so for the sake of democracy. How is that urgency expressed? Just think of the whole issue of employ-

ment equity. We know that in his latest report, Commissioner Yalden, who is respected by Canadians as he has been a public servant since 1956, told us that we are far from the goals for employment equity set in the early 1980s. The same goes for recognition of same-sex couples.

All that is to say that we should keep things straight. We think that it is unhealthy to rush this process because we see no urgency for democracy, unlike our friends in the Reform Party. We think that when it comes to redrawing the electoral map, we should take the time to do things right because democracy and issues of representation are at stake. For these reasons, I cannot support the amendment.

(1335)

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix): Mr. Speaker, you have been telling us that you travelled extensively in the province of Quebec, as I am sure you have done right across Canada. But if you have not visited the great region of Charlevoix yet, I invite you to do so because, as you know, this is the region that used to be represented by the former Prime Minister, and he certainly promoted the region, the city of Baie Comeau in particular.

Charlevoix is both a tourist and industrial region on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River, a very desirable tourist region that several members from Quebec and Canada would love to represent. Electoral boundaries readjustment could be used to divide to conquer.

As several members indicated, a sense of belonging already exists within regions, ridings, RCMs, municipalities and even school boards. As I understand it, this government's priority is to create jobs, reduce unemployment, keep students from dropping out and provide increased security to low income families as well as seniors.

The time the government will spend redrawing the electoral map, dividing certain regions in Quebec and other Canadian provinces in the process, will undermine the efforts of the men, women and corporations that have been working together. As you know, at one time, if one municipality—and it is the same with regions—if one got a CEGEP, the neighbouring municipality or region wanted one of its own. You ended up with a lot of duplication between regions. White elephants were built in various cities and regions, which the people now have to pay for with their school taxes and their municipal taxes.

I think that more and more, since the last electoral boundaries readjustment, people had thought—and they still do—that the electoral map would remain the same for the next 20 or 25 years. More and more, in socio-economic summits and sectoral round tables, people have been taking charge of prioritizing viable economic initiatives to create employment and this has prompted mayors and councillors in some municipalities to

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assume responsibility for themselves and even make compromises so that each region could get its fair share of benefits.

With respect to the infrastructure program developed by the current Liberal government, several municipalities and RCMs have met with the Union des municipalités du Québec or the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, as far as smaller municipalities are concerned, to try to make the program as effective as possible. Also, many small municipalities cannot afford to pay for their share of this tripartite cost-sharing program.

So, many have decided to get together to invest in joint projects within a given RCM and buy sanitary landfill equipment or some other piece of equipment, just to take advantage of the program, create jobs and make the system useful and profitable for the region without getting into debt, especially the small municipalities, as in some cases the per capita subsidy could be \$15,000. They got together and conceived a major project that would benefit small municipalities. In addition, Mr. Speaker, we hear more and more about high school drop-outs at the Grade 9, 10, 11, and even 12 level. In my riding where there are four school boards, they co-operate to design programs to make primary and secondary schools more cost-effective and interesting and to prevent kids from dropping out of school in every community. I am sure that this is done in Charlevoix and it must be done in every other region.

(1340)

The Charlevoix region took control of its own destiny in this regard and will do so again in the future to ensure its industrial development. To ensure such development, we must deal with small and medium-sized businesses and other economic issues. For this, we need dialogue and co-operation between municipalities, and that is when some municipalities will give priority to certain issues rather than others.

Mr. Speaker, the riding of Charlevoix includes 42 municipalities on the North Shore of the St. Lawrence forming four regional county municipalities, four chambers of commerce and four school boards.

I think that this government has a lot of work to do to create jobs and improve social security, and that it would be a good thing to defer this bill for at least two years to let the economy recover and allow us to dot the *i*'s and cross the *t*'s. I also think, as the member for Charlevoix, that there is a lot to do at home, in every region of Quebec, and mainly in Canada.

Mr. Gaston Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues, I too wish to speak on Bill C-18 and express my opinions, which are heavily slanted in favour of the riding of Richmond—Wolfe which I have the pleasure of representing in this House.

First of all, I would like to review some of the events leading up to this debate on Bill C-18. As you know, every time the census rolls around, Canada's chief statistician asks the Chief Electoral Officer to establish electoral boundaries commissions with a view to redrawing the electoral map to keep pace with demographic growth and to ensure more balanced representation in the House.

As a fundamentally democratic party, the Bloc Québécois is fully aware of the importance of such a process. One of our party's fundamental objectives, in particular with an eye to Quebec independence, is the exercise of democracy in its broadest sense. Mindful of the inherent democratic rights of the citizens of Quebec and Canada, the Bloc Québécois wishes to support any measure which will bring about a thorough review of legislation which dates back thirty years, namely the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

Therefore, in this regard, and with certain reservations, the Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-18 which calls for the suspension of the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act for a period of two years and the abolition of the eleven existing electoral boundaries commissions.

The Reform Party has moved three amendments to Bill C-18. The first would shorten the suspension period from 24 months to 12 months, the second would delete the clause providing for the abolition of the commissions and the third would amend the clause which grants the government the authority to abolish the commissions. The Bloc Québécois does not see the relevance of such amendments and will certainly not support them. The democratic objective pursued by our party leads our members to support an in-depth review of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. However, as I mentioned earlier, the Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-18 with certain reservations.

(1345)

First, we believe it is essential to point out the arbitrariness and inconsistency of some boundaries established in the past and, to that effect, we must emphasize the importance of administrative divisions in Quebec.

As some of my colleagues have done, I will illustrate that point by referring to the division of regional development councils. These administrative zones not only have a strategic importance for Quebec: they are also based on fundamental geographic, economic, industrial, and cultural considerations. Consequently, as long as the province remains part of the Canadian Confederation, the federal commissions readjusting electoral boundaries will have to take into consideration regional county municipalities, as well as administrative regions.

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We also feel that the decentralization of decision-making authority is an essential component of the regional policy of the year 2000, something which is definitely not a component of the current central government's policy. Indeed, we are well aware of how uncomfortable the federal government is when it comes to delegating powers to regions and to provinces in particular.

Our second reservation regarding Bill C-18 has to do with the total lack of consideration of regional autonomy in the provincial and federal policies of English Canada as a whole. Regarding this aspect, I would like to quote some reactions following the announcement of the proposals made by the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

As soon as the proposals made by the Electoral Boundaries Commission for Quebec were announced, on February 9 of this year, they were criticized by a good number of people representing the political, social and economic sectors in the Eastern Townships. Let us take the example of a municipality which plays an extremely important role in the economy of the riding of Richmond—Wolfe. I am referring to the city of Valcourt, which benefits from the presence of Bombardier, a company playing an extremely strong and powerful role in the development and the economy of the area. The mayor of Valcourt, Mr. Denis Allaire, finds it hard to understand why, under the new boundaries, his municipality would become part of the riding of Drummond, and he intends to voice his opposition to such a change.

It must be understood that the electoral boundaries readjustment is not an opportunity for a mayor or for corporate or ordinary citizens to say that they do not want to become part of a riding: these people are merely reaffirming their sense of belonging to a riding and to an economic and socio-cultural region. It is interesting to note that Mayor André Leclerc of Warwick worried about the opposite situation, which would see his municipality become part of the riding of Richmond—Wolfe. The mayor feels that Warwick would be removed from its natural ties, operations and activities with the region of Victoriaville, in the riding of Lotbinière.

He also felt that this readjustment would disrupt the economic regions.

I would also like to refer to a comment made in *La Tribune* by the hon. member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead, who said: "The member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead is not pleased at all to see that part of his constituency will become part of the Thetford Mines region"—this will help illustrate the mistakes which can be made to the detriment of a region's natural development—"and he intends to express his discontent loud and clear to the commissioners when they hold their hearings in Sherbrooke." It is not that he holds a grudge against the citizens of the asbestos region, but Mr. Bernier maintains

that there is no affinity between the two poles. He said he knows the riding very well and he is convinced that people of Mégantic relate first to the Sherbrooke region and only secondly to Saint-Georges-de-Beauce. Therefore, the Mégantic region has no connection whatsoever with the asbestos region. Except for family ties, the people of Mégantic and those of the Thetford Mines region have practically nothing in common.

(1350)

I would even add that in the Richmond—Wolfe riding, the integration process which affected the municipalities of Rock Forest, Saint-Élie, Deauville, Valcourt, Racine and Richmond, made it so that the majority of the population, involved in the development of a strategic plan for the RCM of Le Val Saint-François associated with another extremely important RCM, Sherbrooke, would see the best part of its discussions, efforts and co-operation go up in smoke, just as the outcome of the plan for joint action on economic, social and cultural development in that region.

Evidently, the people in these communities have developed a sense of responsibility over the years; they were asked to do so— They were always told they should take their future into their own hands and accept responsibility for their own economic, social and cultural development. They were told it was important for them to bring the decision centres closer to their region. In this respect, the readjustment of electoral boundaries goes against all the work that has been done over the years in Quebec in the area of joint action and the establishment of decision centres closer to the people involved and more attuned to their analysis of local problems.

In Quebec, in recent years and more precisely since 1985, regional conferences have given priority to joint action and development projects focusing on municipalities and surrounding regions. Over the years, this process has led to thinking and developing a strategic plan involving the creation of regional county municipalities—or MRCs as they are called in Quebec—which co-ordinate their own plans at a higher level, that of economic development councils or regional development councils. As a result, each region in Quebec signs a general development agreement with the government and the Department of Regional Development.

The exercise of electoral boundaries readjustment demonstrates that Ottawa is not sensitive to that. It does not take regional development into consideration, does not understand it, and sets limits which have nothing in common with natural economic development and, in particular, nothing to do with the fact that local governments are trying to make their own decisions, to do their own analysis of problems, and to implement their own solutions to development problems.

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Clearly, we support this review and, if Quebec remains within Confederation, we would like people in charge of preparing new legislation to take notice of these fundamental structures in Quebec. Regionalization and taking charge of one's destiny is something for the 21st century, and the Liberal government, the government in power, will have to understand that some day.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans): Mr. Speaker, I will start by denouncing the attitude of Reform Party members to their own amendment. It is curious, not to say strange, that members elected on a platform to reform Parliament let the other opposition party monopolize debate on their own amendment. This is curious.

In my native region of Saguenay, we call that: "Do as I say, not as I do". Like my colleague who just spoke, I am totally against the amendment proposed which would reduce from 24 months to 12 the period allowed to study a new electoral map.

(1355)

Indeed, I think that we clearly indicated that we would agree with the government position to defer this whole issue by 24 months. Why do we need more time? First, we think that criteria other than demographics must be considered. It is true that we must have balanced electoral districts with about 70,000 people, but we should also consider other criteria such as the size of the territory.

We know that my riding of Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans entirely encompasses the provincial riding of Montmorency, a part of the provincial riding of Charlevoix and a part of the provincial riding of Beauport—Limoilou. So, a single federal district includes all or part of three provincial ridings. I am sure that it is exactly the same in the other Canadian provinces.

Second, of course, if we have large federal electoral districts, chances are that we will have a very large number of municipalities in that territory, each municipality having different characteristics and different needs.

The third reason or third criterion that leads us to prefer a 24-month deferral is the number of regional county municipalities, entities that are specific to Quebec and that essentially constitute regional self-governments. When we have a large federal riding, it sometimes overlaps more than one RCM, once again with different characteristics, needs and concerns.

Finally, the fourth point that leads me to prefer this deferral is the social and economic components of each of these municipalities.

Since we have an opposition role to play and are not here to praise the government in office, despite what the member for Saint-Boniface is saying, we can blame the Liberals for delaying the bill with the consultations that are getting under way. In

this issue, it is as if the arms did not know what the brain is asking for. I leave it up to you to determine who constitutes the arms and who constitutes the brain, but we realize, because of the delay in tabling this bill, that the consultations should never have started.

In our opinion, the reform should have a greater scope. Without calling it by its name, I would be remiss if I forgot that the Bloc Québécois, and the majority of Quebeckers in general, are asking for the abolition of the other House, knowing how efficient members of that House are and how efficient that institution as such is. We know that in 1993, the other House sat for 41 days, at a cost \$43 million to the Canadian treasury. Reform could also encompass out right abolition of the other House.

In concluding, I would like to tell you that, nevertheless, in Quebec, we are convinced that the reform will have a greater scope because, very soon, Quebeckers will have to decide their future in a referendum that will be coming in the new year.

The Speaker: I know that the hon. member has a little time left to speak. If he is not done, he may continue after three o'clock.

It being two o'clock, pursuant to Standing Order 30(5), the House will now proceed to statements by members, pursuant to Standing Order 31.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

THE CANADIAN FLAG

Mrs. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph—Wellington): Mr. Speaker, while our country is made up of people from different cultures, backgrounds and histories, we are united under certain symbols we hold close to us.

One of those symbols is our flag. Our flag is displayed throughout the Parliament buildings. I am pleased to see so many members of Parliament displaying the Canadian flag in their offices. While some may also display the provincial flag the Maple Leaf is always prominent.

The flag reminds us that first and foremost we are Canadians. While we represent our individual ridings we do so in this national forum for the good of all Canadians.

The pride we feel when the Maple Leaf is raised during the Olympic Games is a reminder of how important our flag is for all of us. We should never forget how much our flag means to us and what it symbolizes to the world. I encourage every member to display our Canadian flag proudly.

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[Translation]

REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Commissioner of Official Languages tabled his 1993 annual report.

Many instances of discrimination against francophones were reported again in federal institutions as well as in several provinces. In fact, the commissioner stressed, and I quote: "that the system of providing federal services in both official languages . . . was not yet functioning as it should".

This year again, access to French language education is difficult, if not impossible in certain regions. Also, the issue of school governance by francophones has not yet been settled in several provinces.

The Prime Minister stated recently: "The million francophones outside Quebec, that is my Canada". Unfortunately, this report reveals a huge gap between political rhetoric and reality.

* * *

[English]

CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Mr. Jack Frazer (Saanich—Gulf Islands): Mr. Speaker, our Charter of Rights and Freedoms assures us of security, fair treatment and equality under the law, freedom of thought, belief, opinion, conscience and much more. Most of us know our rights and freedoms, but what about our responsibilities?

Our responsibility to look after ourselves: to protect our health; to gain as much education as we can: to be productive citizens; and, to make the best of our life circumstances?

Our responsibility to family: the foundation on which our children grow; where they are love; learn respect; compassion; and, the difference between right and wrong?

Our responsibility to country: to take pride in our heritage; to attempt to repay what society has given us: to participate in Canadian politics and vote to register our views: to contribute to the future of our nation; and, to be willing to serve in times of need or peril?

We have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What we must add is a charter of responsibilities.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I have just received the booklet entitled "Official Languages Myths and Realities". I recommend it as reading to every member of Parliament and every senator.

Look at the facts and then share them, share them with Canadians so that we can in fact make sure that there are no longer any unnecessary language conflicts.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, this is a wonderful tool to educate, share and get to understand one another better, and I certainly hope that every member of Parliament and every senator will raise these issues and share these facts openly.

* * *

[English]

VIA RAIL

Mr. Roger Galloway (Sarnia—Lambton): Mr. Speaker, public concern regarding the future of VIA Rail service in the Sarnia—Toronto corridor continues to rise. A number of mayors and municipal councils have expressed concern following the release of certain internal documents attributed to VIA management.

The transport department has done nothing to deny or disavow such information. It is indeed ironic that in this time of heightened emphasis on infrastructure our most elementary public service, that is intercity rail service, is overtly and benignly discouraged by government.

If Canadian National can charge its other customers using rail service at the same rate that VIA pays, CN would have an income of \$30 billion per year and not the \$3 billion per year it had last year.

I call on the transport department to order Canadian National to charge VIA a rail usage charge based on reality. Indeed VIA receives federal subsidies which flow through to CN because of this unilateral usage charge.

Let us make some sense of VIA by rolling back track rental rates to a realistic number based on real market value numbers.

I call upon the department to make economic and environmental sense and to guarantee passenger rail service to both urban and rural Ontario.

* * *

CURLING

Mrs. Dianne Brushett (Cumberland—Colchester): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago my home town of Truro, Nova Scotia proudly hosted the '94 Pepsi junior curling championships. At that prestigious national event curling was showcased at its best

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as we saw the men's team from Alberta and the women's team from Manitoba emerge as the Canadian junior champions.

From the Truro Nationals, the Alberta men's team led by Colin Davison went directly to Bulgaria for the world championships. Under the women's rules last year's Canadian champions competed in this year's international championships.

(1405)

In Bulgaria this past week both the Kim Gellard junior women's team from Toronto and the Colin Davison's junior men's rink from Alberta won their respective world junior curling championships.

As a member of Parliament, I am very proud of our young Canadian athletes and congratulate our young men and women as they return home from Bulgaria as world champions of junior curling.

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[Translation]

COLLÈGE MILITAIRE ROYAL DE SAINT-JEAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Saint-Jean, I am proud to congratulate Isabelle Robitaille, Jacques Lessard, Claude Martel and Éric Dion, four graduating students of the military college in Saint-Jean.

Yesterday they won the Jean Pictet debating competition on international humanitarian law against 19 other teams from Quebec, Europe, Africa and Latin America.

This achievement demonstrates the dynamism and competence of the military college in Saint-Jean. It is, however, overshadowed by the announcement that the college will be closed because the Liberal government has stubbornly refused to review its unjustified decision.

If the government's senseless decision is maintained, these students could be the last to attest to the excellent teaching done at the military college in Saint-Jean.

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[English]

TERESA MALLAM

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday one of my constituents, Teresa Mallam of Quesnel, British Columbia, came to Ottawa.

Teresa, *B.C. Report* magazine's Cariboo correspondent, was here to receive the Canadian Association of Journalists prestigious prize for investigative journalism, an award that Teresa

won for an article written in June 1993 about the 1989 brutal murder of Mary Jane Jimmie of Quesnel.

Mary Jane Jimmie's murderer has not been apprehended, but Teresa's persistence in going after the facts and attempting to find out what really happened may now lead to the person responsible being convicted and sent to prison.

I would like to offer my congratulations to Teresa for winning the award and for the high standard of journalism she has brought to the interior of British Columbia.

* * *

ELDERS CONFERENCE

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough): Mr. Speaker, Trent University has the oldest native studies program in Canada.

It recently hosted its 11th annual Elders Conference with 2,000 participants from all over Canada, from the west coast to the east and as far north as Igloolik. The conference was run by more than 200 Trent students. It included exciting workshops and a wide variety of social events. A play by the children from the Kawartha First Nations, a large powwow at Curve Lake and games highlighted the weekend.

The Elders Conference once again received considerable support from the greater Peterborough area. This is gratefully acknowledged by the organizers.

It is truly national events like this one, bringing together native and non-native people, young and old, that demonstrate Canada's strengths. They are evidence that our future lies within the vision of the current Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development of this country rather than within the tunnel vision of some members of the House.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Don Valley North): Mr. Speaker, during the campaign the hon. leader of the Reform Party made the statement that the government's \$2 billion infrastructure program to help kickstart the \$700 billion economy would be like using a flashlight battery to start a 747 airplane.

With our unemployment rate being reduced from 11.6 per cent to 10.6 per cent and with the creation of over 114,000 jobs nationwide in the last two months, I think Canadians would like to know what kind of battery the Prime Minister used. I hope he uses the same batteries over and over again to create more jobs.

* * *

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Mr. Raymond Bonin (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, northern Ontario boasts a population of 825,000 and is a significant wealth creating and exporting region of the country.

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However, due to a multitude of factors northern Ontario has traditionally been a forgotten region of the country. In the coming months we will attempt to rectify this oversight and assert northern Ontario's position within the federation.

Following extensive consultations I hope to bring the region's communities together to set policy priorities, develop an economic vision and establish the regional partnerships required to realize the opportunities set out in the government's red book.

I trust the government will provide our region with the support it needs to attain its goal of greater economic self-reliance.

[Translation]

The people of Northern Ontario are entitled to voice their expectations, to be heard, and to play a more important role in the development of the regional and national policies affecting them.

* * *

(1410)

PEOPLE OF QUEBEC

Mr. Gaston Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, recently, the Prime Minister of Canada said that one had to get out of the Saguenay—Lac—Saint—Jean area to find out what the real world was like.

Similarly, his Minister of Foreign Affairs was glad to see members of the Bloc Québécois come to Ottawa, because this would get them out of the backwoods and broaden their horizons.

Yesterday, their spiritual father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, made another of his nasty statements when he said, and I quote, "that Quebec students do not know their French and when they become intellectuals, they are intellectuals of the worst kind."

Mr. Speaker, these ghosts from the past should realize that Quebecers are far too sensible to pay any attention to their contemptuous remarks and that whatever this herd of snorting dinosaurs may claim, Quebec is a modern and open society that looks to the future.

Quebeckers will soon make themselves heard, and out of these so-called backwoods will rise a great French nation in the Americas.

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[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East): Mr. Speaker, the ultimate tax revolt occurred at the Boston Tea Party of 1773 and the rallying cry behind it was "no taxation without representation".

Did the Americans do wrong in opposing British taxation without representation in the British Parliament?—of course

not. Taxation with representation is not only an entrenched concept in our Liberal democracy. It is a fundamental rule of fairness and common sense.

The burden of debt this government is inflicting on our nation will fall on the shoulders of Canadians not yet old enough to vote. They seem to go unrepresented in this government, yet they deserve a say in the spending habits of their parents because they are the ones who will end up paying the bills.

Parliament does not have the luxury of sending mixed signals to money markets, investors and taxpayers, but most especially we need to send a strong, unified message to young Canadians. Let us start treating taxpayers' dollars like funds held in trust.

* * *

[Translation]

REPORT OF COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, earlier today, the Commissioner of Official Languages tabled his annual report.

As our language rights ombudsman, it is his role and his duty to point out the shortcomings in the system, not to complain about discrimination, as a member of the Bloc Québécois was saying, but to improve the system by pointing out its defects. He has a role similar to that of an opposition party that reveals what is wrong in the government, to protect the interests of the people.

There is bad news, but there is also good news in this report. For instance, the Commissioner of Official Languages has commended the government for reinstating the Court Challenges Program. He also indicated that the rate of bilingualism among teenagers in Canada has risen in every Canadian province and territory. Furthermore, and this is an important point, the cost of providing bilingual services in Canada was approximately 30 cents per \$100 of service provided or 0.2 per cent of the federal budget.

* * *

[English]

YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT

Mr. Bill Gilmour (Comox—Alberni): Mr. Speaker, two years ago in Courtenay, B.C., six-year old Dawn Shaw was brutally raped and killed.

Her killer, now 17, is Jason Gamache. The biggest surprise to come out of this trial was not that he had done the deed. Jason Gamache was a repeat sex offender who was not allowed to be with children and he was 11 months into therapy when he murdered Dawn Shaw.

Not even the Courtenay RCMP was aware of this young offender's record of sexual assault. Why? It was because the Young Offenders Act prohibits any professional treating a young offender from discussing the case in public.

Oral Questions

This case calls for two changes in our justice system: first, major changes in the Young Offenders Act and, second, a public registry of sex offenders. We cannot let Dawn Shaw's death be in vain.

* * *

YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House I raised the question of young offenders and pointed out that there was much we had to do in prevention. I would also say as part of that prevention, we must also look at the structural unemployment of young people. Officially we have an unemployment rate of over 17 per cent of young people, whereas in fact it is much higher.

(1415)

I know the government has a youth corps program. It is a start, but it is not addressing the high unemployment of young people. I urge the government to bring forward a real plan for youth.

We are all concerned about youth crime. We know there were provincial, territorial and federal meetings on the Young Offenders Act. I would like to see similar meetings on the very high rate of youth unemployment.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*Translation*]

MANPOWER TRAINING

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. Today, *La Presse* published sections of a document prepared by the Department of Human Resources Development for the next federal-provincial conference to be held next week, on income security.

According to the document, the government has excluded any possibility of transfers to Quebec of authority, budgets or officials. This position is a direct contradiction of Quebec's demands as reiterated last Friday by Premier Johnson, who is supported by a strong consensus in Quebec on this issue among the parties involved.

Are we to understand that this document represents the government's official policy on manpower training, and that having rejected all transfers requested by Quebec, the Prime Minister will only allow joint use of the same building, where the wasteful practices we have witnessed for a number of years, which have prevented the unemployed from getting the training they need, would be perpetuated, but now under the same roof?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal): Mr. Speaker, the working paper from which sections were produced in this morning's media is a paper being used as a basis for discussion at the deputy minister level.

It is quite possible that the ministers will continue to negotiate on the basis of a document that may be amended. So far, we have had a number of friendly and useful negotiations with Quebec. We believe that we can continue those negotiations on the same basis.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, this document which appears today on the first page of Montreal's biggest newspaper was prepared by the Minister of Human Resources Development and reflects the minister's position.

The document, and therefore the minister's position, indicates that bilateral agreements on joint use of buildings will be signed immediately with the provinces. However, yesterday the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs informed the House that there would be no administrative agreements with the provinces on manpower training for the next two years.

I want to ask the Prime Minister who is right in this case?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal): Mr. Speaker, once again, this document was used as a basis for discussion at the last meeting. Documents that are used as a basis for discussion basically contain matters that have yet to be negotiated.

Furthermore, yesterday I did not say there would be no single window, certainly not. I said that we suggested to the Province of Quebec, as we did to the other provinces, that we could have a single window for providing manpower training programs, and that is our position. Consequently, the position the Minister of Human Resources Development is exactly the same as mine.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I think it is easy to interpret the minister's remarks. In any case, the document is correct in that there will be no transfer of officials, authority or resources.

Finally, the bottom line for both ministers is that the same 25 provincial and 27 federal programs will now be administered in the same building, so the client does not have far to go to be utterly confused.

I want to ask the Prime Minister, who must be aware of the contradictions here, whether he realizes that by refusing to transfer federal responsibility for manpower training to Quebec, he is perpetuating an annual waste of \$300 million, at the expense of Quebec's unemployed, of whom 20,000 are still

waiting to register for training courses that could help them improve their chances of getting back to work?

(1420)

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal): Mr. Speaker, I repeat that my position is that we are pursuing negotiations with the Province of Quebec and that we have an agreement with the Province of Quebec on eliminating existing overlap.

As I said yesterday, and I say it again today, we are about to negotiate an agreement on income security with the provinces, and meanwhile, we are prepared to negotiate agreements which, at the very least, will include the single-window concept and which may include other aspects of manpower training. Once the reform project has been finalized, we are prepared to conclude more extensive agreements with the provinces, including Quebec.

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MILITARY INDUSTRIES

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

During the campaign, the Liberal Party, in its red book, promised to assist military industries in their conversion to civilian production. Once in power, the government started by cancelling the helicopter contract and then reduced the Defence budget without introducing a defence conversion program. As we can witness today, this government's decisions have had a disastrous impact on companies such as Paramax and Oerlikon.

Is the Prime Minister ready to recognize how important it is to implement, as soon as possible, a defence conversion strategy, as he promised, in order to alleviate the impact of military budget cuts on employment?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry): Mr. Speaker, we are quite aware of the situation at Oerlikon, but as the member knows perfectly well, it will be several years before this company closes its doors. We already have assistance programs in place and military industries in Quebec such as Pratt & Whitney and Canadair are already receiving a lot of support from the federal government. I would suggest that the member take the time to review the situation at Oerlikon.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve): Mr. Speaker, is the minister aware that because of his pussyfooting and in the absence of a short-term strategy, high-tech industries such as Paramax and Oerlikon will soon have to resort to massive lay-offs? We do not feel like waiting. Action is needed right now. Why abandon all thought of putting in place civilian

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research and development programs to help the defence industries?

[English]

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry): Mr. Speaker, the member seems to be quite mistaken about what programs actually do exist.

The government's program is set out not just in the red book which he referred to but also in the speech from the throne, the budget, and in many discussions we have had in which the member has participated. We have reinforced the importance of the conversion to a knowledge based, scientific innovation economy. That is the plan of the government. That is the direction we are going.

I hope he will get on board and help us to go in that direction.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Yesterday the Minister of Finance told investment dealers that further deep spending reductions are coming. He said: "There are no sacred cows. There are a whole series of government programs that we simply did not have time to get at in the government's first budget".

In March, however, the Prime Minister told an Edmonton audience that all spending reductions for the next three years were on the table.

Will the Prime Minister end this stream of mixed signals coming from the government and tell the House whether the government will be announcing additional spending reductions in the months ahead?

(1425)

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I said that the cuts that we had provided for in the budget were needed to achieve our goal of 3 per cent of GNP for the deficit. But we said that there was other work being done.

We are looking at this time at other opportunities for cuts. The minister of federal-provincial relations, who is responsible for renewal of the government, is looking at all the boards and commissions that are reporting to Parliament or to the Prime Minister or to ministers in order to cut more. More cuts are coming and we are working on them.

I repeat that the program we put forward in the budget is the program that will lead us to the goal that we stated clearly in the campaign and in the budget. We will do everything necessary to reduce the deficit in relation to GNP at 3 per cent.

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Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question. Let us get this absolutely clear.

If I understand the Prime Minister, he is saying that there will be additional spending cuts in addition to those outlined in the recent budget.

Is that the correct understanding of the government's position?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I will make the answer very clear. C'est oui.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, just so that we have this absolutely clear, we all know that the finance minister is talking about further spending reductions to try to boost investor confidence in the Canadian economy. However, investors realize that the Minister of Finance will not prevail unless he is fully supported by the Prime Minister.

Will the Prime Minister assure us that he supports the finance minister when that minister calls for additional spending reductions not contained in this year's budget?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, yes, mais oui ça veut dire yes.

The Minister of Finance has my full confidence, my full support. He has the full support of all members of cabinet and all members of the caucus.

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[Translation]

OERLIKON AEROSPACE

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Industry.

The daily newspaper *Le Soleil* reported that a ministerial briefing note addressed to a federal Cabinet minister expressed concern about the demise of Oerlikon Aerospace's operations in Saint-Jean. The note warned the government that the firm had very few orders on the books and that without a true diversification and conversion program, it was in danger of folding.

Now that the minister knows about Oerlikon's very uncertain future, does he intend to move quickly to support the diversification of the company's operations and thus ensure the survival of this high-tech firm which has seen its workforce shrink from 750 to 300?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry): Mr. Speaker, I understand full well that the hon. member, like the member who earlier raised questions on the same subject, is very concerned about this company's problems. Oerlikon is working on a number of contracts. In fact, it recently received a contract worth \$15 million.

Our goal is to find ways to help companies grow, not just in the field of military equipment, but in others areas of research and development, in keeping with the new economic climate.

We are prepared to work with Oerlikon, just as we are prepared to work with other firms.

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question.

Will the minister not recognize the need to take urgent action instead of waiting for the company to shut its doors, as we saw happen with Hyundai?

(1430)

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry): Mr. Speaker, I think that Oerlikon shareholders also want to take action rather quickly. First, the company needs to address this issue. Secondly, governments may also help Oerlikon, but not necessarily by granting subsidies. Oerlikon needs to have a commercially-sound business plan. This will be the key to its success and to the success of other firms.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

Ministers of this government continue to send out mixed signals on important economic issues. Yesterday the Prime Minister suggested that the drop in last month's official unemployment rate was the result of successful Liberal economic policies. On the same issue the Minister of Finance admitted that much of the drop was due to 28,000 young Canadians giving up their job search.

Does the Minister of Human Resources Development regard driving young Canadians out of the job market as successful economic policy?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, the figures released last Friday show that over the past two months 115,000 new jobs were created in Canada. Most important and what we can take some confidence in is that 75 per cent of those jobs were full-time jobs.

I share the hon. member's concern about the real problem this country's young people face. One of the reasons we have started a major recasting of many of the programs is so that we can specifically target the needs of young people.

In this case the Prime Minister was certainly correct when he said that generally the economy is improving as a result of the new sense of confidence Canadians have as a consequence of this government's actions.

At the same time we are also aware of the need to begin to deal adequately with youth unemployment. If the hon. member can show some patience for a day or two I think he will see the

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beginning of a very serious attack on that problem by this government.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, my supplemental is also for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

The Prime Minister suggested yesterday that the infrastructure program should receive some credit for the drop in unemployment in March. The fact is that not one dollar of infrastructure spending has yet been spent. It should be no surprise that financial markets are confused by the contradictory statements made by the ministers of this government.

At this time when credit rating agencies are reconsidering Canadian issues and no level of government has any spare cash, will the minister cancel the infrastructure program and save \$6 billion in borrowed money for Canadians?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, the only confusion is that of the hon. member.

The Prime Minister said very clearly what we have all said. The investments under the infrastructure program are an added bonus that will create further confidence and activity and will help get the engine of this economy going.

I can tell the hon. member that last week, in the company of the President of the Treasury Board in my own province of Manitoba, a neighbouring province to his, we announced 133 projects for over \$130 million creating close to 3,000 jobs in that one province alone. Manitobans are very happy about that.

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[Translation]

MIL DAVIE SHIPBUILDING

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans): Mr. Speaker, the future of MIL Davie Shipbuilding in the Quebec City region remains very much in doubt. To survive, the only shipyard in Quebec needs a quick decision from the federal government on two specific issues. However, the government is still deferring its decision on the proposal to build a ferry for the Magdalen Islands and refuses to disclose its intentions regarding the multi-functional “smart ship” project.

My question is for the Minister of Industry. If the government still believes in employment, why is it putting off its decision on these two projects, when they are part of a real defence industry conversion strategy and would ensure the future of this shipyard?

(1435)

[English]

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry): Mr. Speaker, it is clear with respect to both of the projects the hon. member mentioned that it is important for the government as the steward of the taxpayers’ money to make decisions that are fundamentally in the best interests of the taxpayers ultimately.

With respect to the project of replacing the *Lucy Maud Montgomery* I know my colleague the Minister of Transport is giving active consideration to what his department’s needs are with respect to that ferry. The decision will be taken in due course. As to where the contract will be let, that will need to be done on a commercial basis.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans): Mr. Speaker, does the government realize that, with every passing day, its inaction threatens the survival of the biggest private business in the Quebec City region and that it would be dangerous to put off its decision for partisan purposes until the election in Quebec?

[English]

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry): Mr. Speaker, I would certainly agree with the hon. member that it would be wrong to put off important decisions for partisan reasons.

I would point out to him however it is important that a large decision involving a lot of the taxpayers’ money must be made for the right reasons. It will not be subject to this kind of pressure in order to make a decision which would prove to be the wrong one.

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OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Today the 1993 annual report from the Commissioner of Official Languages was tabled in the House. In his report Victor Goldbloom states: “Given the present economic circumstances, we are more convinced than ever that the bilingualism bonus should be eliminated”. Last year those bonus payments cost taxpayers nearly \$51 million. Increased budgetary expenditures as opposed to the government’s stated intent of deficit reduction sends out a mixed signal.

Will the Prime Minister follow the commissioner’s strong recommendation to eliminate bilingualism bonuses, thus assuring tax weary Canadians his government is serious about deficit reduction?

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Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I do not think the commissioner has made a strong recommendation. He has recommended we look into that and we will look into that.

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Prime Minister might explain if any decision to act in this long overdue area will result in the cancellation of tens of millions of dollars in retroactive bilingualism bonus payments to the RCMP?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, there are always some administrative problems with any program. We are looking into it.

This program has been a very good incentive in Canada in helping a lot of people to learn the other official language. It is a great asset when people can do that.

In fact, the report indicates that the number of young Canadians who have become bilingual since the program was instituted has gone from 3 per cent to 11 per cent. That means the number of young anglophones who have learned French and francophones who have learned English has quadrupled since this program was instituted. It is a great thing for Canada.

All those who can have the two official languages feel better about it. The hon. member who is bilingual should be grateful we made it possible for him to learn the other official language.

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[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORT

Mr. Paul Mercier (Blainville—Deux—Montagnes): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. The future of rail transport is being compromised by current government plans. Yet, rail freight remains a major development tool in several regions.

As far as the Official Opposition is concerned, a moratorium must be declared on the elimination of further sections of railway in eastern Canada to allow true consultation to take place with those affected.

(1440)

Here is my question: Will the Prime Minister agree, first of all, to declare such a moratorium and, second, to hold regional public consultations before taking actions that could prove to be extremely harmful to the economic future of several regions?

[English]

Mr. Joe Fontana (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

As he knows, this question has been asked of the Minister of Transport a number of times in this House. Also, he should know that the critic for his party and the Standing Committee on Transport are looking at rail rationalization.

I should point out to the members there is a regime in place called the National Transportation Agency that is to look at rail abandonment and rail rationalization. That is the vehicle by which rationalization is considered. No, we have no plans to declare a moratorium. There is a system in place for that to occur.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Mercier (Blainville—Deux—Montagnes): Mr. Speaker, I would have preferred my question to be answered by “yes”. Perhaps I will get an affirmative answer to my supplementary question.

Is the Prime Minister prepared to reconsider government plans that are liable to further emphasize disparities between Eastern and Western Canada?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I would like to answer that question. I think that transportation is an important issue, and the parliamentary secretary answered the question well. However, at the present time, we have many programs to review. Just yesterday, his leader was asking us to cut budgets. Today, the hon. member is asking us to increase government spending.

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[English]

FISHERIES

Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

In February of this year Canadian fishermen were absolutely elated that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans was able to obtain a NAFO moratorium on the fishing of 3NO cod. However that celebration was quickly muted by the fact that the European union abstained on the vote thereby retaining their right to fish this very endangered stock.

Can the minister tell us what the current status is? Has he been able to convince the European union about the seriousness of the situation off the east coast of Canada?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for that very difficult question.

As the member well knows the Prime Minister made clear on behalf of this government that we intended to deal with the problem of foreign and domestic overfishing and that we would do so by agreement if possible and by unilateral action if necessary.

I am pleased to report to the member that this morning in Brussels the European Council of Ministers unanimously ratified the February 17 moratorium on 3NO cod. The government promised action. We have begun the process of taking effective

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action. More action will follow in the weeks and months to come.

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OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, I wish the answers we got to our questions were as good as the ones the Liberal members get from their ministers. Talk about mixed signals.

My question is for the minister of heritage. The minister of heritage released a 40-page book during the spring break telling Canadians that any and all questions about out of control costs of the Official Languages Act are based on misconceptions. He says it is a myth that the costs are in the billions and that the true cost of providing services in both official languages in 1992-93 was \$319 million.

Can the minister tell this House why his number is dramatically lower than even the number of the Commissioner of Official Languages, which was \$654 million?

Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Speaker, the figures are correct but they do not pretend to cover all forms of support to the official languages of Canada.

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, that is what we have been saying all along. The fact is that the true costs, the full costs, the direct and the indirect costs are not known. We have been asking in this House for a debate on that very issue. Will the minister commit to a debate on that very issue?

(1445)

Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Speaker, the figures are available. If my colleague has not been able to read them, I would be glad to provide them to him.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FISHERIES

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Gaspé): Mr. Speaker, cod fishermen in the Gaspé region believe that there will be an increase in crab quotas and they want part of it. Of course, crab fishermen are defending their turf and tension is rising. Cod fishermen are poor and idle, many of them are nearing the end of their unemployment insurance benefits. They are fighting for a decent living, they are fighting to put bread on the table. The minister cannot keep on ignoring them.

My question is for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. Since the minister has not yet tabled his fishing plan for crab in zone 12, nor his plan for the future of fisheries, nor his financial aid program for fishermen, when is he going to give a clear answer? Will he wait for the situation to deteriorate even more?

[*English*]

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question and for his interest in this matter. I offer him the same courtesy as I have done so in writing to both him and his leader and that is for a full briefing on any matter that affects the fishermen of Atlantic Canada.

I can tell him that while he has not found the time the fishermen and their unions in Quebec have found the time and I have met with them repeatedly on this subject. Were he as well briefed as they, he would know that within a matter of a few weeks both the Minister of Human Resources Development and I will announce a wide-ranging and comprehensive response to the fishing crisis in Atlantic Canada, one that is generous, one that recognizes the depth of the crisis in the region, but one that is responsible in terms of the fiscal capacity of the government of the day.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Gaspé): Mr. Speaker, by being indecisive, the minister has created tensions in the fisheries. Does he not recognize now that fishermen are expecting more than a government statement, that they want precise explanations on the decisions to come? People are waiting, tension is high.

[*English*]

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, both the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Department of Human Resources Development have been engaged in the broadest consultation on the future of the fishery that has ever been undertaken by the Government of Canada in its history. We think that consultation is going to result in a positive, constructive and realistic announcement within a matter of a few weeks.

If the member is serious about wanting to know more he should take me up on the offer that I have given to the fishermen from the province of Quebec, fishermen from the Gaspé region, and come and receive a full briefing on the subject.

I would be interested in hearing the member's positive and constructive comment on this difficult situation. It is easy to make noise. Sometimes it is more difficult but more worthwhile to try and make some sense.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Paul E. Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Could the Prime Minister clarify the mixed signals his government is sending out on criminal justice. On one hand the justice minister talks about tightening the criminal justice system. On the other hand a senior Liberal member has been

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widely quoted on his agenda of having lifers paroled at 15 years. The justice minister says he welcomes such suggestions.

Would the Prime Minister please tell the Canadian people which of these two members reflects the Liberal position?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, may I suggest that the hon. member is not being fair to the facts. The truth is that two weeks ago or perhaps three the chair of the justice committee, if that is the hon. member's reference, gave his own views with respect to penalties for murder. I was quick to say on that occasion that he did not speak for this government, that he was expressing his own view. Indeed, I disagree with him.

He is but one voice on a committee of 15 persons on which his own party is well represented. The committee will have ample opportunity to influence the policy of this government on criminal justice.

As to mixed signals, may I make it plain that our position has been uniform and clear throughout. It has been that we are going to deal with crime in this society just as we said on the platform, both by making the laws of this country more effective and enforcing them more effectively. That means, among other things, changes to the Criminal Code and the Young Offenders Act as necessary, at the same time recognizing the importance of crime prevention and all that that means to the same effort.

(1450)

There are no mixed signals. Our position has been straightforward and consistent throughout.

Mr. Paul E. Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want action. They want a clear guarantee from the Prime Minister that killers who perpetrate drive-by shootings, kill people in restaurants and invade peoples' homes will be locked away until they are no longer a threat.

Will the Prime Minister give that guarantee today?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I spoke yesterday in response to a question in this House expressing my own horror at the recent savage and senseless crimes. I expressed my view as well that we must not let our anger and our concern regarding those recent events have us jump to conclusions about simple solutions to these problems.

Yes, it is time for action. As I said yesterday, this government is at present putting together proposals which will come soon to this House to make the criminal laws of this country more effective and also deal with the need to respect the importance of crime prevention in these initiatives.

Before long the hon. member and this House will see concrete action from this government.

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VIA RAIL

Mr. John Richardson (Perth—Wellington—Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, this question is for the Minister of Transport or his designate, the secretary.

Recently the newspapers have been full of rumours about VIA Rail cuts to passenger rail service for Canadians, more specifically, the route from Sarnia, London, Stratford, Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph, Brampton to Toronto. This route is presently one of the most patronized routes in all of Canada.

Could the minister or his designate provide the assurance that this rail route will not be abandoned?

Mr. Joe Fontana (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member for Perth—Wellington—Waterloo.

I should point out that these rumours are simply that, rumours, and are based on unfounded speculation. This government has not made any decisions on service levels to VIA but members in this House should understand that the levels of budget for VIA have been established by way of the budget that was tabled in February.

VIA is presently undertaking negotiations with its labour unions. We are hopeful that it in fact can gain the efficiencies that it needs, that labour will co-operate in those deliberations and that in fact the public will also participate because the solution to a viable passenger rail system in this country is that all stakeholders can in fact make it possible.

No decisions have been made by this government, nor will they until such time as those negotiations have been completed.

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[Translation]

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Hubert): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice.

After he promised on International Women's Day to consider the possibility of criminalizing excision, the Minister of Justice told us yesterday that he does not intend to amend the Criminal Code or to introduce specific provisions to deal with this form of sexual violence.

The minister considers the present provisions on assault to be sufficient. However, many countries, including France and Great Britain, have felt the need to legislate specifically on excision.

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Why does the minister refuse to criminalize excision, when by doing so he could send a clear message to those who are guilty of it?

[English]

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I tabled a document with the House following question period in which I furnished written information with respect to the conclusions to which I had come on the subject of female genital mutilation, making it clear that I concluded after investigating the matter during the past month that the response lies not in further change to the Criminal Code but rather more effective education and enforcement of the present laws.

The document I tabled made it clear that during the past 30 days I conferred with among others the attorney general of Ontario. I have spoken to members of a task force which she put in place. I met in my office with the chair and members of the National Women's Committee that produced the report that gave rise to the original question. I examined the factual situation in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia, the provinces in which this problem is most pronounced. The consensus of opinion was that the focus of the federal government at this time should be on education in partnership with the provinces and community groups. That is where we are going to solve this problem and lessen its incidence, not in further amendments to the Criminal Code. That is the conclusion to which I came.

(1455)

[Translation]

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Hubert): Mr. Speaker, would the minister have us believe that these opinions and studies and those of his advisers will be more effective than formal legislation making excision illegal?

[English]

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, female genital mutilation is already a criminal misdeed in this country. It is plainly contrary to at least three sections of the Criminal Code.

Yesterday I furnished the hon. member with a copy of the document that I tabled with the House setting forth the analysis upon which I rely for those conclusions.

In my respectful view, it is not going to help dealing with this difficult and tragic problem for us to refine further a code that already prohibits the misconduct. Our focus must be on ensuring that the people who arrive as immigrants and the people who are in Canada already are aware that it is against the law and that the provincial authorities work with us in enforcing those laws sternly and efficiently. I believe that is the way to come to grips with this problem and that is the conclusion which I expressed in the document that I tabled.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the justice minister. Perhaps that is reflective of the growing fears of Canadians of the incidence of home invasions, drive-by shootings and other random acts of violence in this country.

I would ask the minister what specifically he intends to do to curb this urban terrorism and protect the safety of law-abiding citizens.

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, may I first take this opportunity to say that I do not share the alarmist sense that the hon. member communicates in her question.

Of course I am appalled, as all Canadians are, with the savagery and the senselessness of the crimes to which she has referred. Clearly we cannot tolerate such violent crime in this country.

At the same time I urge the hon. member and Canadians to keep this issue in context. This country has a justice system which works. The statistics demonstrate that in terms of violent crime and crime in general in Canada we are still a civilized society.

I will conclude by saying that we should not be stampeded by these single events by jumping into what seem to be simple solutions. At the same time, we have to take them for what they are, symptoms that further actions require. By changes to the Criminal Code, the Young Offenders Act and by focusing on crime—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary North.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, I sincerely respect this minister, but I would say that voicing the concerns of my constituents and other Canadians should not be labelled by the minister as alarmist.

In fact, I would suggest to the minister that his continued answers to the effect that, yes, there is a clear problem that we are deeply concerned about but let us stay cool is not an answer at all to Canadians.

I would ask when the minister is going to table the changes to the Criminal Code and the Young Offenders Act that Canadians have been demanding and expecting. They want to know a timeframe.

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): I will be brief, Mr. Speaker.

When I said that I did not want the hon. member to be an alarmist, I respect the concern. I am just saying that we should keep it in context and that basically we have a safe and civilized society.

In terms of timeframe, I have already said that I propose to bring to this House before the end of June specific proposals to

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change the Young Offenders Act and, at the same time, to turn it over to the parliamentary committee for its detailed review.

I have said as well that we are going to have legislation before the House before the end of June on other changes to the Criminal Code, including with respect to sentencing. We propose to fulfil that undertaking.

The Speaker: I thank the minister for being brief.

* * *

(1500)

WORLD NORDIC GAMES

Mr. Joe Comuzzi (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

In March 1995 Thunder Bay will host the World Nordic Games. Our community, through the great work of all the volunteers, has worked very hard for the last four years to make sure that this event is an international success. The city and the province have also committed over \$8 million, but unfortunately the federal government has failed to even come close to this amount, in fact less than a quarter.

Since the games are less than a year away, I ask the minister how much he is going to commit financially today to the Nordic Games, when will he make that commitment, and when will he announce what services will be provided so that the people who are involved in this process can get on with their job of making it a success?

Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his short question.

I share his concern that the Nordic Games be a great success because I think it will bring a lot of tourism and business to North Bay.

The federal government has committed \$2 million and is honouring its commitment. It is looking into the possibility of providing services to make sure that the games are a success. We are in close consultation with the minister concerned in Ontario and with the mayor of Thunder Bay. I am confident that putting our efforts together will ensure great games at Thunder Bay.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order. I wish to draw to your attention the presence in the gallery of Mr. Olexander Stoyan, member of the new Parliament of the Ukraine.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

POINTS OF ORDER

COMMENTS DURING QUESTION PERIOD

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a little correction to an answer I gave earlier on the number of people who are bilingual in Canada, when I referred to the francophone and anglophone population. What I should have said was that in 1971, 3 per cent outside of Quebec were fluent in the two official languages, and now because of our policy of bilingualism in Canada it has almost quadrupled at 11 per cent.

Mr. Joe Comuzzi (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I remind the Minister of Canadian Heritage that if he is going to North Bay to look for the World Nordic Games he won't find them.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

COMMENTS DURING QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): Mr. Speaker, I want to raise a point of privilege with respect to a statement made by the hon. member for Crowfoot in the House on March 25, the last sitting day before the Easter recess. This is the first opportunity I have had to raise the matter.

In a question to the Minister of Justice the hon. member stated that I had said: "that convicted murderers like Clifford Olson should not have to serve more than 15 years for their crimes."

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it absolutely clear that I never made such a statement. The statement by the member is absolutely false and I would ask him to apologize and withdraw his statement.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member surely has a point of debate. I am sure there are other avenues that he can pursue at this time, but he does not have a point of privilege.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

(1505)

[Translation]

**ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT
SUSPENSION ACT, 1994**

The House resumed consideration of report stage of Bill C-18.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères): Mr. Speaker, I also have the pleasure—

*Government Orders**[English]*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order, please. I wonder if members would come to order so that we might be able to resume debate.

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, it seems that the question period was very lively. The debate is still heated.

So, I also have the pleasure to speak to Bill C-18, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Suspension Act, 1994.

Of course, as you were able to see from the various statements made since this morning, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of the bill. Since the beginning of the electoral boundaries readjustment process, the Bloc Québécois members, in keeping with the Elections Act, have decided to get involved in that process so as to defend the interests of their constituents, of their fellow citizens.

This morning, you heard our colleague, the member for Shefford, say that he has always resided in the riding of Shefford and that with the new provisions or new proposals introduced by the Chief Electoral Officer, he would become a resident of the riding of Chambly. So, it would be somewhat unusual for an individual who has always resided in one particular riding to represent a riding in which he has never resided, simply because of changes made to electoral boundaries.

That is why we support the principle of this bill, which is to temporarily suspend the electoral boundaries readjustment process. Of course, we also support the principle of an equal vote for all citizens. But that principle, when applied too restrictively and too mechanically, can produce unfortunate distortions, and I will have the opportunity to get back to that later.

The readjustment of electoral boundaries at fixed intervals prevents the development, the building of a sense of belonging to one's riding. The example that I mentioned earlier concerning my colleague from Shefford is certainly one of the best we can give. He explained it to you very well a while ago. He has been a resident of the riding of Shefford for many years. He now represents this riding in the House of Commons and by virtue of the amendments proposed by the Chief Electoral Officer, he would become a resident of the riding of Chambly but would remain the member for Shefford. Therefore, I believe there are anomalies that must be avoided.

(1510)

This case of my colleague from Shefford shows that people who live in the fringe areas of their electoral district and then switch periodically from one district to another on account of readjustments of the electoral map find it very difficult to

develop a sense of belonging and to identify with their riding because of all this moving around.

As far as demographic criteria are concerned—as I said earlier—we fully support the principle of an equal vote for each citizen of Canada and of Quebec. We do support the principle that each citizen must be represented by a member of Parliament and that this representation is as important as that of any other citizen throughout this country. However, the demographic criterion used for the readjustment of the electoral boundaries too often masks other criteria which should be as important, such as social, economic cultural factors which, I think, should also be taken into consideration in the readjustment of the boundaries of this constituency.

As I emphasized earlier, this sense of belonging, the possibility of identifying with our riding, with the people of our riding are surely as valid as the strictly mathematical calculations mainly used for the readjustment of the electoral boundaries. These calculations inhibit the creation of a type of interaction specific to a riding, to a community. It is a fact that has been recognized, not so long ago, only a few months ago, by the National Assembly which amended its elections act to prevent further readjustment of the electoral boundaries for the next ten years.

It is thus assumed that there will not be any readjustment of the electoral boundaries in Quebec for ten years, which means that for ten years, the residents of a district will be able to feel part of their community and to identify with their MNA. Electoral boundaries are not readjusted at each election as was the case before under the Quebec elections act.

I think that we are now considering the spirit behind Bill C-18. We support the bill, for the reasons I have just stated. In fact, we are not afraid to say that. I will come back to that a bit later. If we have to consider amendments, we will perhaps have to think of redrawing the electoral boundaries on the demographic basis that I talked about earlier. However, as my colleague from Richelieu mentioned earlier this morning, we have to contemplate a more thorough reform of the parliamentary institutions and, in doing so—we know we cannot use certain terms—reassess the role of the other Chamber, the Upper House.

My colleague from Richmond—Wolfe, who is with us this afternoon, and my colleague from Richelieu talked about that issue regularly, and I think that it is quite justified. My colleague from Richelieu said that there are in fact, in the Upper House, a number of people with quite valuable and useful expertise, but those people often end up in that Chamber for reasons that are not too valid. People often get appointed to the Senate strictly on a partisan basis.

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(1515)

Therefore, their legitimacy is very questionable. The suggestion of my colleague from Richelieu was that those people who are qualified, who have plenty of skills should be able to use their skills in this House where people are democratically elected and where their legitimacy cannot be questioned. It was suggested that we should eventually revise and reform our parliamentary institutions and abolish that timeworn and rusty institution that supports friends of the party, friends of the government who periodically, depending on which party sits on the other side of this House, cause changes in the majorities in the other place. Then we could eventually consider such a reform.

Speaking of reform, I am wondering about the participation of our colleagues in the Reform Party in this debate. We are presently discussing a motion brought by them, but for some time now I have seen only members of the Bloc Québécois taking the floor. I believe therefore we should question the seriousness of our colleagues who bring in a motion and leave it to members of the Bloc Québécois to speak on that motion.

I therefore invite my colleagues in the Reform Party to be consistent and to rise on their own motion. We should not be surprised by the silence of our Liberal friends, although it is absolutely deplorable for the electors of the various ridings represented by Liberal members to see those members being so absent and silent during a debate of such significance for the future of their constituents. The interests of the constituents of those ridings represented by those Liberal members are at stake.

That being said, I will now leave the floor, at least I hope, to a member of the Reform Party.

Mr. Maurice Dumas (Argenteuil—Papineau): Mr. Speaker, all my colleagues have already invited you to visit their riding. I do not have to do the same, since you probably have been to Mirabel Airport a few times to catch a plane. You were then in the riding of Argenteuil—Papineau.

With the last electoral reform, the population of Argenteuil—Papineau would rise from 72,000 to 98,000. Should I rejoice in this increase, or deplore the changes in the electoral map?

Before making my case, I would like to talk about some of the anomalies or aberrations created by the reorganization of electoral maps or any other boundary change requiring expropriations. I would like to relate a rather bizarre event which took place when part of Sainte-Scholastique was expropriated to make room for Mirabel Airport.

I do not know who determined what lands were to be expropriated, but an astounding event occurred in the village where I live, Saint-Canut. A line was drawn through the middle of a house, through the middle of a property. Really, it did happen.

The house was later demolished but, at the time, people wondered why certain parts of the village were being expropriated and others not.

(1520)

This reminds me of different electoral map anomalies. My colleague from Laurentides represents the neighbouring riding, where two municipalities are included in totally inappropriate territories. For example, the village of Sainte-Sophie is adjacent to the riding of Laurentides. Children go to school in Saint-Jérôme which is in the riding of Laurentides. Sainte-Sophie is socially part of the riding of Laurentides, but on the electoral map, it is part of the riding of my colleague from Joliette.

Moreover, that same riding of Laurentides includes the municipality of Chertsey, which is much closer to the riding of Joliette. In view of this fact, how, I wonder, do senior officials, cartographers, geographers, all those people who draw boundaries, manage to get such results?

Personally, I cannot complain about the electoral reform since the areas which would be added to my riding, namely the city of Saint-Jovite, the village of Lac-Carré, as well as La Minerve, La Conception, Labelle, Lac-Supérieur and Mont-Tremblant, are all part of a strong sovereigntist riding which, for decades now, has been represented by the Parti Québécois in Quebec's national assembly. So, as a sovereigntist and partisan of a sovereign Quebec, I should be pleased with an addition to my riding which I am likely to benefit from.

However, Mr. Speaker, I must tell you that in the best case scenario, I will not be campaigning in the next federal election, for the simple reason that important events will have taken place in Quebec. Indeed, the Parti Québécois will surely be elected in the coming year. A referendum will be held the following year and, at that time, Quebec will become a country and a sovereign nation. Consequently, my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois and I will no longer be in the picture during the next federal election. However, the fact remains that, as members currently representing Quebec, we have to play the role which we assumed and we must defend Quebecers' interests, and this is precisely what we are doing today.

Two municipalities would be added; I just mentioned Saint-Jovite. Earlier, my colleague from Laurentides deplored the fact that Saint-Jovite and the surrounding municipalities which I just named would become part of the riding of Argenteuil—Papineau. I have no complaint about that, but I think that these municipalities have nothing in common with Argenteuil—Papineau, since they are located in the south-north axis from Saint-Jérôme to Mont-Laurier. Moreover, these communities all have an identical profile, they belong to similar regions

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which they must continue to be part of, and I believe that Saint-Jovite should remain part of the riding of Laurentides.

Thurso is also being added to my riding. This municipality is of course located on the way to Ottawa, and its mayor, councillors and citizens have openly voiced their opposition to their community becoming part of Argenteuil—Papineau. I can understand that, since this municipality is much closer to the Outaouais region than to the regions of Lachute, Mirabel or even Oka, which are also part of Argenteuil—Papineau.

(1525)

Consequently, I have little choice but to oppose the amendment proposed by the Reform Party.

Mr. René Canuel (Matapédia—Matane): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the excellent speeches made by my colleagues and I will not repeat what they just said. I simply want to know how some decisions that make absolutely no sense are arrived at.

What are the reasons for making a riding in eastern Quebec disappear? And I am talking about my riding, Matapédia—Matane. Geographically, it is one of the most beautiful ridings, and the people who live there and whom I have the pleasure of serving are truly attached to their RCM and to their parish. I have travelled throughout the riding and people are very disappointed. Is this decision based simply on a demographic ratio? Are numbers the only important factor? Apparently, yes, Mr. Speaker.

For a region like mine, a rural MP is terribly important. I do not mean to say that MPs from urban areas are not important, but I would say that maybe rural MPs are particularly important because of the distances involved. The various parishes are approximately ten miles apart. It takes hours, if not days, just to go around my riding.

In our part of the country, the MP plays an essential role. Just spend one day in my office in Matane, Amqui or Mont-Joli and you will know what is asked of an MP there. It is incredible. After going everywhere else, people end up inevitably in their MP's office because they trust him. He has a say in the important decisions on regional development.

Regions experiencing growth face different problems than regions which are in decline. Unfortunately, our region is in decline. Is the importance of rural people being neglected in the distribution of electoral districts? I think so. Rural people are not considered important and I would even say that they are treated as second-class citizens. I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, but there is no such thing as a second-class citizen. Every person has the right to live where he or she wants to, to feel a sense of belonging to the place where he or she lives, and that sense of

belonging must be respected. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case in my riding.

In our view, the commission's proposal will only further impede recovery in an area that is already considered to be among the poorest. It will mean the loss of a much-needed voice in Parliament for eastern Quebec. It would make it harder for a member of Parliament to defend the interests of an ever-larger riding.

(1530)

This proposal would not allow cultural, political and socio-economic forces to do all they could to bring about the economic recovery everyone wants, especially in our underdeveloped regions. This goes beyond simple statistical calculations and the straightforward application of a demographic formula.

I am very happy that the subject has been raised in the House because when I toured my riding, I noticed that there was widespread dissatisfaction. People were asking: Will we feel like voting in a federal election if the federal government shows no respect for our community, our living environment?

In Quebec, regional county municipalities are becoming more and more important and I think that it is a good thing. The boundaries of a federal riding are also very important. People are wondering whether they will go to vote if they change ridings.

As I said earlier, there are now five ridings in eastern Quebec: Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Gaspé, Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, Matapédia—Matane and Rimouski—Témiscouata. The ridings of Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup and Rimouski—Témiscouata have a population of about 73,000. The riding of Gaspé is the largest with an area of 12,268 square kilometres. My riding, Matapédia—Matane, is close behind with an area of 10,959 square kilometres, and the riding of Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, is the smallest with 5,476 square kilometres. As for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, it is the least populated, with 52,000 inhabitants. Is the number of inhabitants the only criterion? I say no. There are other criteria.

As for the number of municipalities in each riding, Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup has the most, 49. In Matapédia—Matane, there are 46. The riding of Gaspé has the fewest, 30.

In the proposals made by the commission, the number of ridings in the East would decrease from five to four. The riding of Matapédia—Matane would no longer exist. The riding of Gaspé would see its population increase from 62,000 to 80,000 with the reform. The riding of Gaspé—Matane would cover a gigantic area of 17,783 square kilometers.

If you tried to cover that distance in Toronto or Montreal, you would soon be all over the city.

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The riding of Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine will also be significantly enlarged to 11,375 square kilometers from 8,155 square kilometers.

The Bloc Québécois cannot accept eliminating a riding in the East. If we lose a riding, we will lose political influence in the House of Commons, and so will our region. However, I share my colleague's view that hopefully in four years we will not have to ask ourselves these questions.

As a rural region, eastern Quebec would once more be marginalized by this redrawing of the electoral map. The rural community is in crisis. It is particularly the people from those small parishes who come to see their member of Parliament more often.

(1535)

At a time when many organizations and stakeholders want to decentralize government services and bring elected representatives closer to the people, reducing the number of ridings would go against the wishes of the people.

We deplore that, again, taxpayers will have to bear the cost of this reform.

The riding of Gaspé—Matane would include communities like Amqui, Cap-Chat, Gaspé and Matane. So try to imagine the distance the member will have to travel to meet his constituents, and vice versa.

Earlier, a member said that VIA Rail did not exist anymore in our region. Buses are a rare sight. Our roads are in bad shape. What is left for these people to travel? They have nothing, and the government now wants to increase the size of their riding. That is absolutely senseless, and that is why I share my colleagues' view.

[English]

Mrs. Dianne Brushett (Cumberland—Colchester): Mr. Speaker, I have a comment for the hon. member for Matapédia—Matane. I grew up in rural New Brunswick—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order, please. I do not mean to interrupt the member, but I just want to be sure we all understand that there is no comment or question period as such. However the member can certainly use up to 10 minutes to make an intervention on this particular piece of legislation.

Mrs. Brushett: Mr. Speaker, the intervention is to share the sentiments of the hon. member for Matapédia—Matane and his values for the rural communities of Gaspé. Rural New Brunswick and rural Nova Scotia have the same values, needs and long distances between small communities. We too know that representation must come from each geographic region and not necessarily from statistics.

It is important to bring forward ideas. Somehow the hon. member is presenting ideals that we all share and want, yet at the

same time he feels they will not be here for the next election. That is entirely contradictory in spirit and thought.

[Translation]

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa): Mr. Speaker, I wish to express my support for Bill C-18 which suspends the process of redrawing federal electoral boundaries.

My riding of Bourassa takes in the entire city of Montreal North. Currently, I represent the 85,516 residents of this municipality. Under the proposed readjustment, the riding's population would increase to 94,214, whereas the average population of federal ridings is 91,500.

If the proposed reforms are carried out, my riding will extend beyond the limits of Montreal North. This municipality is steeped in history. It has its own well-established traditions and a very strong identity. For over 75 years, it has been home to a vibrant community, organized with people, not just administration, in mind.

(1540)

In our opinion, the new administrative distribution is totally arbitrary. Montreal North has its own community, economic, social and cultural agencies. There are many community agencies in Montreal North that are doing an amazing job. Montreal North has over 3,000 volunteers. My riding, like the rest of the province, was hard hit by the economic crisis from which we are just now emerging. Fortunately, we can count on community agencies that are doing incredible work.

One local community social service centre in Montreal North recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. A few days ago, a benefit dinner and gala were organized by the CLSC foundation of Montréal-Nord. All local officials were in attendance, including yours truly in his capacity of federal MP. I want to take this opportunity to praise the remarkable work of the director general of the centre who has been there since day one. I also want to assure the centre that it can count on my complete co-operation.

The residents of Montreal North also have close ties to the mayor of their city who has held this post for over thirty years. He recently celebrated three decades in office and I was on hand for the festivities. He enjoys the public's support. Unlike me, he is not a sovereigntist or a member of the Bloc Québécois. However, I would add that—

An hon. member: Just give him time.

Mr. Nunez: That will come. I wish to point out his contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of Montreal North. Montreal North also has a recently formed economic and community development corporation that is doing a great job for the people of Montreal North, especially with boards on economic issues that bring together representatives of the people.

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The citizens of Montreal North want a federal riding that they can really identify with. In fact, I have consulted the residents of Montreal North about changing the name of my riding.

My riding is named Bourassa, after an outstanding man, a former director of *Le Devoir*, a great intellectual. But we have a problem because there is a provincial riding with the same name, Bourassa, and there is always confusion. My constituents want the riding to be called Montreal North, so it is more closely identified with our city, just as ridings in other Canadian cities are called Calgary West, Calgary East, Edmonton North, Edmonton South and Québec-Est; they take their name from the city where the riding is located. That is not the case in Montreal North and I am often asked where Bourassa is. Sometimes it is also confused with the former Premier of Quebec, Robert Bourassa.

(1545)

We want to keep our riding as it is now. For all these reasons, I oppose the amendments moved by the Reform Party and I support the bill. Rather than proceed with arbitrary administrative revisions, I think that we should instead look at the basic criteria for forming federal constituencies. Once again, Mr. Speaker, I would vote for this bill.

Mr. Jean Landry (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today to speak on Bill C-18, concerning the revision of the electoral map. I must tell you that, when I heard that the Liberal Party had decided to introduce this bill, there was no doubt in my mind that they could count on my support.

The first thing I wondered about was those people who had decided to draw lines any old way, in their offices, without knowing what they were doing. When they got to my riding of Lotbinière, a beautiful riding along the St. Lawrence River up to the Pierre Laporte Bridge, in Quebec City, or just about, let me tell you that what they had in mind, what they wanted to do to my riding was complete nonsense. It made no sense in practical, professional, political, social or cultural terms.

I can tell you this: many of my constituents called to ask me: "Mr. Landry, what is going to happen to Lotbinière? Will you, as a Bloc Québécois member from Quebec, come to our defence or settle for come what may?" At that time, to reassure my constituents, I told them in a conference and the newspapers: "Look, I am a Quebecker. I am in Ottawa and I intend to stand up for the riding of Lotbinière at the federal level, as well as the interests of Quebec and Canada. That is my duty, and as long as I will be sitting in the federal Parliament, this will remain my vision of the riding of Lotbinière at the federal level."

But there is more to it. From then on, I looked at the basic criteria used by the commission. I was told: "Look, we have to standardize all this as much as possible to make ridings match the RCMs." I was told that the population pool also had to be

taken into consideration. I must say that, in my riding of Lotbinière, we met all the requirements. We had the required population and regional county municipalities. What the revisal office was planning to do was basically to tear apart this most beautiful riding of mine because there is only one major town in my riding, namely Victoriaville-Arthabaska.

Let me tell you what was going to happen to Victoriaville-Arthabaska. In their office here in Ottawa, officials decided to draw a line right across here and chop off Victoriaville-Arthabaska, the biggest town of the riding, and tack it onto the riding of Richmond-Wolfe. Which meant I would find myself with no large town in the riding of Lotbinière. That is nonsense. I must also tell you this because it is very important. Not only were they taking away a town, but there were ties involved, the ties between the people of that town and the rest of the population of the riding. Victoriaville-Arthabaska is the queen city of the area which includes Princeville, Daveluyville and Warwick, and it was shunted off towards Sherbrooke, to be attached to Richmond-Wolfe.

(1550)

Such a drawing of electoral boundaries leaves me speechless. To me, and to the whole riding of Lotbinière, it did not make sense.

If such electoral boundaries had been implemented, the riding of Lotbinière would have been wiped off the federal electoral map in a few years.

If that was the intent, it was a mistake. I am glad to see that our colleagues from the other side adopted the same position as we did because it is sad to see so much money being wasted. Some would say that money is not the only thing, but we are going through difficult times and we need money.

Instead of going ahead with the new boundaries suggested, I would rather see the money used to create jobs and train workers. Then, I would find that we put the money to good use. We must not forget that we are talking about not a few hundred thousand dollars, but millions. And you know that millions can go a long way.

Of course I do not accept the Reform Party's amendment at all. I am glad that we took a position that will soon be adopted, confirming the present boundaries of the riding of Lotbinière. In four years from now, if the Bloc Québécois is not here any more, I will at least be able to say with pride that as the member for the federal riding of Lotbinière, I took a stand when I had to. That is what is the most important for me and my constituents. In four years from now, we will see whether we have to change our position.

In my riding, social and cultural life is centred on Victoriaville and Arthabaska. It is all there.

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I am glad that there has been a change in direction because I felt we were heading the wrong way. My constituents are quite pleased also because I told them last week that we would probably not have to appear before the commission. I certainly hope this bill will be passed soon and that all consultations will be called off.

Mr. Speaker, when my colleagues across the way or my colleagues on this side come up with good ideas on electoral boundaries readjustment, I can look at them with an open mind. I like to be able to stand back to get a better understanding before I make a decision with this team.

I like this House and, for the time being, I am here to defend the interests of both Quebec and Canada. At this very moment, I do not talk as a separatist as such. I am here to look out for the interests of Quebec and Canada, and my position on the electoral boundaries readjustment is quite clear.

Mr. Nic Leblanc (Longueuil): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Verdun—Saint—Paul for his applause at the start of my remarks, but it might be wiser to wait and see what I have to say.

I think what my colleague meant is that, for the time being, he takes to heart the interests of both Canada and Quebec. That is my interpretation.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate on Bill C-18 and more particularly on the amendment moved by the Reform Party. I have to say I do not agree with the amendment, because it does not give us enough time to examine fully the impact of those boundary readjustments.

(1555)

I remember that in 1985-86 we went through the same exercise. We had to redefine a riding on Montreal's south shore, a process which took quite a bit of time because it was suggested then to cut out from Longueuil the area which was expanding. Indeed, a proposal had been made to remove from my riding the whole industrial zone where lots were available for development purposes. I was going to find myself trying to promote the economy of my region with almost no opportunities left to do so. Primarily for that reason, I asked the mayor of Longueuil for his opinion on this issue, and I also consulted with representatives of the Liberal Party, who were opponents but also colleagues, and we agreed that it would not be a good idea to divide Longueuil in that fashion.

Consequently, we had to redefine five or six ridings. The decision not to reduce the number of constituents in the eastern part of the riding but rather to the south meant that we had to redraw the ridings of Saint-Hubert, La Prairie, Saint-Jean, Chambly and Verchères. You can imagine how long this exercise

took. This is why I support the bill proposed by the Chief Electoral Officer in the document on new electoral boundaries.

There is another reason why I believe more time is needed, particularly in the case of Longueuil and the vast region on Montreal's south shore. The Montérégie is the region which has been experiencing the strongest growth in Quebec over the last fifteen years. It is in that region that the largest number of jobs were created. I believe it is also where the population has increased the most. In fact, it is for these reasons that a new riding is proposed on Montreal's south shore, as well as on the north shore, in Laval.

I should point out too that many studies are currently underway, including the Pichette report, commissioned by the Quebec government, which also proposes the creation of new regions on the south shore. The south shore would no longer be managed by the Société montréalaise de développement or SMD, but would be divided into two sub-regions which would be managed by the greater Montreal area. We would have Montreal, two regions on the south shore, Laval, the West Island, as well as the east end of Montreal which could form a large community for the purposes of economic development. Obviously, this will result in major changes on Montreal's south shore.

As I just mentioned, the south shore is currently managed by the Montérégie. I personally sit on the Partners for Employment committee—along with members of Quebec's national assembly, mayors, reeves, representatives from regional county municipalities, as well as senior federal civil servants—and I realize that the Montérégie region is not necessarily easy to manage. There are many interests which are not common.

(1600)

The people in Granby, Bromont and Saint-Jean do not have a lot in common with the residents of Longueuil, Boucherville and Saint-Lambert. That is why we have undertaken an in-depth review of how to better manage the Greater South Shore of Montreal in order to be more efficient at all levels, whether it be economic development, social affairs, cultural affairs, or tourism. So, we are currently conducting this in-depth review to make sure our region can prosper in the areas I just mentioned.

So, the fact that we have two years and commissions to help us examine in detail how we can divide the ridings on the South Shore is very useful, and I think we really need all of these things.

Of course, for the last fifteen years, I have been very involved on the South Shore of Montreal. I do not need to be reminded, but I feel I must point out that, in 1983-84, during my term as chairman of the Chamber of Commerce of the Greater South Shore of Montreal, we addressed this issue. As you can see, it is a lengthy process.

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In those days, we talked a lot about decentralization and accountability. If we want to get to know each other better, we need to feel a sense of belonging to be able to take charge of our lives and meet our responsibilities.

I for one have always believed that decentralization and accountability will help us pull through and take charge.

Unfortunately, the Liberal government tends to centralize everything and to manage from the top, which I think hinders progress, and I cannot agree with them on this. We absolutely need to ensure that the people at the grass root level, those who know their needs, who know what they have, who know their resources and their market, can take charge.

How can we go about it? By giving this responsibility to smaller areas. And it is in this spirit that I have been working with the Partners for Employment committee on the South Shore for a long time now.

Here is another suggestion. If we want to make people aware of their responsibilities, we will also have to ensure that municipalities have the resources they need to prosper and to help businesses to prosper.

Again, who is closer to small and medium-sized businesses and thus better able to help them create jobs? People who know well the needs of these small and medium-sized businesses must be the ones to give them the support they need to prosper and create jobs.

That does not seem to be important to the Reform Party. On the contrary, it appears to me that a sense of belonging to a region must absolutely be achieved if we want to create more jobs and work together to improve everybody's lot. It is in that spirit that we, in Quebec, have been working for a long time to delimit regions that are so homogeneous that people living in them can recognize and understand each other, grow and prosper together.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, I will vote against this amendment by the Reform Party and I hope that it will be defeated—and I think it will, since the government is against it—so that we can all prosper, create jobs and do better.

(1605)

Mr. Réginald Bélair (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to participate in this debate for several reasons. I will start by pointing out how recommendations were made regarding the readjustment of electoral boundaries. The act is rather obsolete as it goes back to 1964. It is obvious that conditions have changed in 30 years. But what irritated me the most in all this is how the Ontario electoral commission proceeded to propose new boundaries.

This commission proposed that each riding should have at least 80,000 residents without taking into account regional

affinities or distances to be covered so that every member can serve his constituents properly. I could give you a few examples of regional affinities.

First of all, my immediate region, that is the eastern part of the riding, was divided in two. A region that, since its foundation, has always shared the same economy, the same culture, the same social programs. It is more than a habit, it has become a tradition for this region to stay together. But it has been divided in two. The western part of the region was twinned with Algoma, which extends as far south as Lake Ontario. The name James Bay was added to Algoma, as the riding would now be shaped like a snake going around the region of Timmins to go east and then north to the western shore of James Bay. It makes absolutely no sense.

The second part was twinned with the city of Timmins, which would become Timmins—Cochrane. After consulting with people and with business, municipal and other leaders, it became obvious that it would be totally inappropriate to twin a small, rural part of a riding with a large city for the simple reason that the constituents, the voters of the large city would prevail over those of the small, rural region because of their numbers. And God knows that numbers in this country speak loud and clear. So much for the eastern part of my riding.

In the western part of my riding, the situation is somewhat similar. The western part of my riding was twinned with the existing riding of Thunder Bay—Nipigon. Again, municipal leaders and chamber of commerce directors told me they wanted to stay rural so that their identity would not be diluted, would not be lost within the big city of Thunder Bay that boasts some 100,000 residents.

What I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, is that the electoral commission's proposal was, in my opinion, outright provocation. A provocation that ignored regional affinities and distances to be covered in the vast region of northern Ontario. It is an immense region! There is a limit to taxing the energy of a member. I know what I am talking about because my riding is the fifth largest in Canada and, naturally, the largest in Ontario.

This bill was born as a result of the representations made by all parties in this House.

(1610)

The proposed legislation will be used to correct the glaring errors and outdated provisions and will give birth, if you want, to a new act which will define the terms of reference of electoral commissions throughout Canada.

I personally look forward to this new legislation, not really because my riding was going to disappear, but because two ridings in northern Ontario were supposed to disappear. Of course, once again, southern Ontario stands to inherit, or shall I say gain these ridings. With the four ridings already proposed by

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the commission, that would have meant six more ridings for southern Ontario.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I am telling you that we would have fought like crazy to at least keep the 12 ridings we currently have in northern Ontario, and I would like to make a digression, if I may. Native people are slowly but surely heading towards self-government. And 13,000 Native people live in my riding and 30,000 more live in the neighbouring riding of Kenora—Rainy River, represented here by my colleague, Robert Nault. I have always believed, and my colleague will agree, that it is about time we create a new riding which would be 98 per cent native and where the main goal would be to elect an Indian or a native member to represent these constituents in the House of Commons.

If you link all of this to the fact that we were about to lose two ridings, you will understand that it was out of the question. If we were to think positive, we would in fact consider adding a thirteenth riding.

One final word, Mr. Speaker. It is obvious that our party will vote overwhelmingly in favour of Bill C-18 and we hope, as I mentioned earlier, that the next bill which will define the terms of reference of the commissions will be a little more reasonable and sensible than the current legislation.

Mr. Paul Mercier (Blainville—Deux-Montagnes): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the bill before the House gives me an opportunity to introduce my constituency to the House at last.

Most people know where my constituency, that is Blainville—Deux-Montagnes, is located. It extends from the Mille-Îles River, in the south, up to but excluding Mirabel, in the north, and many of us have gone through it to reach Mirabel Airport or to spend a relaxing weekend in the Laurentians.

People who travel through the riding would be well advised to stop once in a while to enjoy its special attractions.

As for electoral redistribution, the problem in my constituency does not come from big distances as it does in the constituency of my colleague who spoke before me and who told us about its huge territory. On the contrary, mine is mainly a very densely populated urban constituency, and I can easily get around the riding by bike, as I often do. Small distances have their advantages.

Our problem does not stem from big distances but from the rapid population increase, so much so that an electoral redistribution based on the current population would probably be outdated at the time of the next election.

This rapid population growth in my constituency is due to several factors which I will now enumerate.

(1615)

First of all, there is residential development which is growing extremely fast. Many people from Montreal and Laval choose to come and live with us because of the advantages of this semi-rural and urban riding, where we are both close to leisure activities and occupations in Montreal and leisure activities in the Laurentians. Because of these advantages, the population is growing very rapidly. Cities such as Lorraine and Rosemère have mostly very high-standard houses. Other cities in the riding have a wide variety of dwellings that attract people. Thus, a city such as the one that I know best since I was its mayor for a long period of time needs a new primary school every year to deal with this population growth. So, we do not know what the distribution figures for the new population will be in three or four years. The fact is that a division that would be decided today would be outdated by that time.

Apart from that very rapid residential development advantage, there is also the fact that our riding is the location of several industries, from a giant company such as GM, in Boisbriand, to many small and medium-sized businesses created by the strong dynamism of the people, and medium-sized industries such as Stablex, Novabus or Hyprescon.

Nevertheless, we must not forget that part of the riding is covered by provincial Bill 90 which protects agricultural land and that agriculture in the riding is on a very high level, especially market gardening, since we are close to Montreal, which means that the riding's economy is expanding despite the recession and will continue to expand, which in turn makes it attractive to investors.

In the riding, we have autoroute 13 and autoroute 15 running north-south and autoroute 640 running east-west. The riding is very conveniently located in terms of its distance from Dorval Airport and Mirabel Airport. It is also 20 kilometres from the Port of Montreal, which means it has an ideal infrastructure. It has a number of very modern, well-situated industrial parks set up very recently, especially Boisbriand and Blainville which are along one of the major highways, and we are very proud of our labour force whose skills are very attractive to investors.

We have a number of educational institutions of very high calibre, including the Institut d'ordinaire which is well-positioned to help develop high-tech industries, and also Lionel Groulx CEGEP and other institutions, so that we are able to provide a quality labour force.

Another aspect which may be interesting for people who go to the Laurentians for recreational purposes is that we have a number of recreational resources but are much closer to Montreal. Of course, we still have a lot of green space. There is still a lot of countryside in the riding. For instance, we have the "Domaine vert", a protected area where no construction is

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allowed, a huge expanse that has equestrian trails, bicycle paths, hiking trails, and so forth.

We also have a large number of golf courses. Then, there is the Blainville Equestrian Park where every year two international events are held, as well as a very impressive fireworks display.

We also have an historic event which has become a tourist attraction. There is a church in Saint-Eustache that still bears the marks of shots fired at Quebec's patriots by the British. Fortunately, those shots hit the stones of the church and we have carefully preserved those stones to remember this extremely important event.

(1620)

This being said, I will now conclude by saying that, since our riding offers some advantages that stimulate its demographic growth and since the makeup of its population changes constantly, any decision made today regarding the distribution of electoral districts would likely become obsolete tomorrow. In a nutshell, this distribution would divide our riding into two ridings that would include three cities that are not part of the existing riding. On one side, we would have Sainte-Thérèse, Boisbriand, Saint-Eustache, Deux-Montagnes and Sainte-Marthe, for a total of 130,000 people, and on the other side we would have Blainville, Rosemère and Lorraine, which already belong to our riding, plus Bois-des-Filion, Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines and Terrebonne, which would be added to our riding to the detriment of neighbouring ridings.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I support this bill to postpone the decision regarding the distribution of electoral districts.

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf): Mr. Speaker, an electoral map is much more than a matter of paper and lines. An electoral map is not a sheet of paper where we find what we call ridings at the federal level, or, more colloquially in Quebec, counties. An electoral map is above all people that have some common cultural traits, economic resources and infrastructure links.

When technocrats, in an office tower, pore over the map and try to redistribute the population in fairly equal numbers among the electoral districts, lines start to move. We are sometimes left with the impression that the movement of these lines is based exclusively on a mathematical formula aimed at roughly balancing out the 295 electoral districts in Canada.

If this were really the way of doing it, a computer could no doubt do it better and faster. Let us take, for example, the existing electoral map for my riding of Portneuf. There we find, in the eastern most part of the riding of Portneuf, a small portion of Quebec City. Yes, Mr. Speaker, in the riding of Portneuf there are about 600 constituents who live in Quebec City. They live on the other side of CFB Valcartier, which puts about two kilometres between them and the rest of the riding. They are to be

found on both sides of Valcartier Boulevard, along a stretch of about a kilometre and a half.

No matter how hard I try, Mr. Speaker, you will understand that I have great difficulty, as a member of Parliament, identifying with these constituents, since their problems are not really related to those experienced by the rest of the riding of Portneuf. So, no matter how hard I try, I must face the fact that those people would be better served if they belonged to the neighbouring riding, strictly on the basis of geography, of belonging to one municipality rather than to another, of commuting to one's work place, etc.

(1625)

Because of the proposal before us regarding the electoral map, in the next election, if any, these people will now be part of the neighbouring riding further east. But that is not the only sacrilege, if I may use that term, that we can see in the electoral map of the riding of Portneuf. At the other end, on the west side, I have two municipalities that belong to the RCM of Mékinac. These are people who deal particularly with municipalities in the neighbouring riding of Champlain.

Here again, we see the problems with relations and services. For instance, if these people have to deal with the Canada Employment Centre, they will not go to the office in Portneuf, but to the one from the neighbouring riding. And, of course, it is still possible to communicate with that employment centre, but that increases the paperwork. In fact, yours truly has to interact with four employment centres. That is a lot of employment centres, a lot of people to get to know, a lot of contacts to make and to maintain. Ultimately, that creates a waste of time, a waste of effectiveness, and citizens are not being served as well as they could be otherwise.

In fact, just recently, at the beginning of the break preceding Easter, I had the opportunity, with my colleague from the riding of Champlain, to meet the council of the municipality of Lac-aux-Sables. One night, two members of Parliament and a municipal council met at Lac-aux-Sables to consider the possibility of letting my colleague assume my responsibilities at the employment centre and in other organizations in his riding since, for reasons of distance, it would be easier for him than it would be for me to assume those responsibilities for residents of Lac-aux-Sables. My intention was not to give up on those responsibilities but simply to rely on a colleague that I fully trusted and who would be in a better position than I to carry out those responsibilities from day to day.

We discussed the issue. I must stress that the meeting was held at the request of the municipal council. After a long and useful discussion, we came to the conclusion that it would actually be much simpler for the constituents of my riding to be served by the member of the neighbouring county because their belonging,

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their spirit, their culture, their ways, their communications were closer to the neighbouring riding.

However, the new proposal regarding the electoral map that we are discussing does not mention anything about that municipality and perhaps the neighbouring municipality becoming part of the neighbouring riding. I want to say, and I might conclude on that, that when a review of the electoral map takes place, it might not be a bad idea for those who are working in office buildings to come and visit the various ridings, to go into the field and see where the real borders are between people.

Again, an electoral map is not a piece of paper with straight borders running across. A riding is made up of people. Those people have needs and I am sure that it would be very easy to communicate with the member from each riding and the members from neighbouring ridings to see how people could be better served.

(1630)

The decision on where to draw the line has nothing to do with the number of constituents. The basis representation is not only a matter of numbers, but also, and more importantly, of culture and cohesion among people. I think I have spent the 10 minutes I had. I would like to thank the House for listening and I hope that it will listen as carefully to the following speakers.

Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand (Québec-Est): Mr. Speaker, I was anxious to rise and speak on Bill C-18, a bill that proposes a review of electoral boundaries. I must say that the current proposals for readjustment are very favourable to my riding of Québec-Est, since it would add to it the beautiful town of Loretteville. Québec-Est is a rather large riding with about 80,000 voters, which also includes the two small municipalities of Vanier and Ancienne-Lorette. They are within the territory of Quebec City, the capital of the future country of Quebec. It is entirely logical to add Loretteville to the riding of Québec-Est.

One of my problems is with the name Québec-Est, because the riding is not on the east side of Quebec City, but rather to the northwest. The name has been kept for the sake of tradition, because the riding has a long history. Several Prime Ministers were born in that riding and at least one has represented it. This is a riding I love, a riding I am proud to represent.

I have no objection to taking Loretteville, that would be an asset for the riding. Québec-Est does not have the ski runs of the Laurentians, we do not have the Rockies, we do not have any geographical feature which would set us apart, but we have a quality of people second to none in Quebec or Canada. It is important to talk of the quality of the people, because a riding links groups together, and in this case it links three municipalities which work well together, and have a special drive because of the quality of the people.

In the town of Ancienne-Lorette—a town I like, and where I live—there is a group called *Solidarité Emplois*. It was set up by two retired persons, Mr. Dubé and Mr. Déry who said: “We are fed up with unemployment. We are not going to wait for the Liberal Party to do something, because when the time comes to create employment you don’t wait for the government. We are going to act now”.

(1635)

These people have put in place a program called “Solidarité-Emploi”. They have brought together a number of volunteers and have made representations to find unemployed people in the city of L’Ancienne-Lorette. With the assistance of volunteers, they have found some employers and served as contacts between the employers and the unemployed. This is what a number of people in L’Ancienne-Lorette, in my riding of Québec-Est, have achieved.

This is an example of the quality of the people who live in Québec-Est. Surely we could add the city of Loretteville because I have no objection to this revision of the electoral map.

The other example comes from the town of Vanier. The town of Vanier is completely surrounded by Quebec City. This is a small municipality which is pretty dynamic. Vanier also has its own problems of unemployment, among others. Perhaps it is one of the municipalities which has to struggle the most against unemployment and yet, it surprisingly shows lots of dynamism.

There is a particular organization called “l’ADEC-V”. We still have volunteers, some good citizens of Vanier, who campaign every year to raise funds to help people on welfare and give Christmas gifts and food baskets to the needy.

In this group called l’ADEC-V run by a certain Mr. Lemoyne, there are 65 volunteers who carry on a whole series of activities all year round.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for interrupting a Franco-Ontarian colleague in such a flight of oratory. However, I invoke the rule of relevance, citation 459 in *Beauchesne*, which says that members persistent repetition or raise issues which clearly have nothing to do with the bill being considered.

It is very interesting to hear him talk about volunteers from his riding, but we must admit that it is just a little too much. This is stretching things out.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I am sure that other members were wondering if this was relevant. I am also sure that the member from Québec-Est is soon going to show the connection and come back to the issue under consideration.

Mr. Marchand: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You are quite right and I applaud your great wisdom! I was coming to that. I was going to make the connection between these eminent individuals who live in the riding of Québec-Est and stress with great emphasis how important it is not to change the electoral map

without thinking about it for a while. As we well know, it could have disastrous effects.

In the past, it had disastrous effects and because of changes in the electoral map, people had to get used to a new riding. As we know, it takes years to build a riding such as Québec—Est.

I do not disagree with the planned electoral boundaries readjustment since in my case, Loretteville would be added to my riding, and I welcome this change.

(1640)

It is obvious that reviewing electoral boundaries takes much longer than 12 months; it takes at least two years. And it requires a lot of serious thinking. We know that the only reason why the Reform Party is putting forward this motion to conduct this review in 12 months is because it wants to take advantage of these changes as soon as possible. Twelve months. In the next election, they could even—As we know, they hope to win more seats.

At any rate, I submit that it takes a minimum of two years to review any changes in the electoral boundaries and that it would give the Reform Party a bit more time to refine its parliamentary strategies so that in two years, when those changes are made, it might actually win more seats. As it stands today, should an election be called, it could lose some of its most important members.

In conclusion, I would say that this bill is very important and that we need at least 24 months to make sure that the readjustment process is fair and equitable. I thank you for your attention.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: No.

Mrs. Madeleine Daphond—Guiral (Laval—Centre): Mr. Speaker, electoral boundaries readjustment, be it in Canada or in Quebec, even though always the result of logical decisions that could be based on questions of demographic or geographic balance, is nonetheless never sheltered from what can be called the “political touch”. Indeed, only the magic touch would explain some of these readjustments, but I am not one to get shocked at such things.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I have represented Laval—Centre here since October 25, 1993. Laval, the second biggest city in Quebec, now encompasses three federal ridings, named very logically. In the east, there is Laval—East; in the centre, Laval—Centre, and in the west—yes, you guessed it, Mr. Speaker—Laval—West. This electoral boundaries distribution within Laval redressed a previous rather absurd situation in which the Laval—des—Rapides constituency was partly in Laval and partly in Montreal. This great riding was separated—what an ugly word—by the Back River, or Rivière—des Prairies, that no one

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could swim across. The river was not an example of pollution clean-up in those days nor is it today.

To see our member of Parliament, we had two options: cross the bridge or watch TV. Mind you, the then member for Laval—des—Rapides, who also sat in your chair all those years, did a remarkable job. Like you, Mr. Speaker, she was a TV star. However, when I look at the distribution within Laval proposed by the reform which Bill C—18 would suspend, I am surprised that some strange particularities are maintained. I will come back to that at the end of my speech.

This debate is not about the need to review the distribution of electoral boundaries but about the need to rush into some minor and some major adjustments.

(1645)

According to Mr. Bernard, distinguished professor of political science at the Université du Québec in Montreal, it is impossible to create several identical ridings; some will have more affluent constituents, some will be more rural. An unbalanced distribution of constituents among the ridings will be advantageous for some parties at the expense of others.

Laval is a region with a total area of little more than 250 square kilometres, but 315,000 people live on that small territory. A third of the labour force works off the island.

Are the three ridings in Laval similar? No, Mr. Speaker. Of the three, Laval Centre is undoubtedly the most urbanized, but the poorest.

The majority of households in Laval Centre rent their housing; over there, they celebrate Canada Day by moving. Just think, between 1988 and 1991, 50 per cent of the population in Laval Centre changed address. I am sure that in the neighbouring riding of Laval West, represented by the Minister of Canadian Heritage, they must celebrate Canada Day differently.

Social and economic conditions in Laval Centre are the worst in the region. The education level is slightly lower and, with the large number of single individuals and one-parent families, 20 per cent of the population of Laval Centre lived below the poverty line in 1990.

To believe one can form equal ridings in Laval is wishful thinking.

I have no problem in saying, as Professor Bernard did, that the desire to reduce inequalities among ridings while preserving the benefits their party could derive from it has created and is still creating important problems for lawmakers.

For political reasons the riding of Laval—des—Rapides has straddled a river for a long time. The same political considerations probably explain why the border between Laval East and Laval Centre, a border everybody knows in Laval, is the Boulevard des Laurentides, but this border stops abruptly, right between two Hydro—Québec power lines.

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Would you believe that this enclave is located west of the Boulevard des Laurentides. It is part of Laval East. Does this make sense? I bet you could not find one voter in that area who could make sense of it.

Democracy requires that citizens fully participate in the making of decisions which affect their community. Whether it is through their representatives in Parliament, such as all of us, or through public consultations, Canadians and Quebecers have the right to be heard and I have no doubt that this Parliament will be listening to them.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead, Federal Deficit; the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi, Old Age Security; the hon. member for Richelieu, Rights of Francophones; the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, Unemployment; the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonnette, Human Rights.

(1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gaston Pélouquin (Brome—Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, today's debate on electoral boundaries readjustments brings out two basic elements of the mini-reform the governments wants us to swallow. There are two things that really bother me in all of this. Although I really wonder about the very relevance of today's debate, I must say that I am more than puzzled by the provisions and directions stipulated in Bill C-18. I have a feeling that not only is the Liberal government not doing much, but it has the bad habit of going backwards.

First, let us talk about the relevance for us, members of Parliament, to go over the readjustment of Canadian electoral boundaries. I really wonder if this issue is very high on the list of priorities of most Canadians. The government brags about listening to the people. The Liberals hold public briefings and national consultations in order to establish their priorities and we end up today, in this House, discussing the number of ridings we should have in Canada. What a crucial debate that is for the political, economic and social future of our country.

Has the minister taken part in these public consultations? If not, there must be some way to provide him with a report on these hearings. If so, then it is very disturbing. Either the consultations took place on another planet or the minister does not give a damn about what Canadians think. If the minister asked the people of Brome—Missisquoi what the federal gov-

ernment's priorities should be, I do not think that many would say the readjustment of electoral boundaries. I want to tell the minister that the people want the government to take action, and what the real priorities they would like to see on the agenda of the House are.

I will conclude by appealing to the reason of a government which seems to have no more compassion. The issues that should be discussed in this House are job creation, control of expenditures and preservation of social programs. The slow economic recovery, the astronomical unemployment rate and the disastrous state of public finances should convince the government of the need to act quickly. And if, despite everything, the government sticks to its idea of electoral boundaries readjustment, let us at least hope that it will do it intelligently and reduce, not increase, the number of members of Parliament. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi): Mr. Speaker, like many of my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, I also consulted the people I represent in the riding of Chicoutimi on the proposal made by the electoral boundaries commission for Quebec. So that you know exactly what I am talking about, Mr. Speaker, and I will be brief because I know that time is nearly up, the riding of Chicoutimi is made up of seven municipalities.

(1655)

They are, of course, the cities of Chicoutimi and La Baie, and the five rural municipalities of Ferland-Boileau, Saint-Félix-d'Otis, Rivière-Éternité, Anse-Saint-Jean and Petit-Saguenay.

Under the commission's proposal, these five rural municipalities that make up the area called Lower Saguenay would be taken away from the riding of Chicoutimi and added to the riding of Jonquière.

Each one of these municipalities refuses categorically to become part of another riding. There are many reasons for that. The riding of Chicoutimi has two major economic centres, namely the cities of Chicoutimi and La Baie. The municipalities of Lower Saguenay have always been economically associated with the city of La Baie. Several services located in La Baie are provided to residents of Lower Saguenay. I will list only a few examples: the Canada Employment Centre, the Small Business Development Centre, La Baie Hospital.

Moreover, the Lower Saguenay municipalities had set up services in which they had invested time and money, like the Chamber of Commerce, the Société touristique du Fjord and the Société de développement de La Baie. Excluding these municipalities from these organizations because they do not belong any

more to the riding of Chicoutimi would jeopardize their entire economic and tourist development.

People in the riding of Chicoutimi have been working for years to reduce the very high unemployment we have in our area. So, for them, electoral boundaries readjustment is not a problem. They want those millions of dollars to be used to find ways of reducing unemployment.

These five municipalities have been working together for a long time on these matters which are essential to their development. unemployment now stands at 16 per cent, and that is what the people of Chicoutimi want us to talk about. They want solutions. That is the reality, Mr. Speaker.

For decades, they trusted the Liberals and the Conservatives. Today, they have had enough. They want to work. They are tired. They are fed up with being overtaxed. So, it is time to stop the futile debates in this House and to tackle these problems first of all.

My constituents in the riding of Chicoutimi are fed up with seeing their purchasing power diminish, which causes more unemployment. They have enough of all the obstacles those two political parties and the former governments invented in the last 30 years to put a damper on job creation in small and medium-sized businesses.

In the Saguenay—Lac—Saint—Jean region, those governments have caused an exodus of young people by stripping them of all hope of survival in their region, because we do not get our fair share of R and D. Both governments have neglected regions like mine. Those are the problems, Mr. Speaker, which my constituents and taxpayers in Chicoutimi want us to talk about.

(1700)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

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And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 76(8), a recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

The next question is on motion No. 2. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 76(8), a recorded division on the proposed motion stands deferred.

The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred divisions on Bill C-18, an act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. We will vote on the deferred motions as listed on the Order Paper. The first vote will be on motion No. 1.

Call in the members.

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:

(Division No. 26)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Althouse	Benoit
Breitkreuz (Yellowhead)	Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville)
Brown (Calgary Southeast)	Cummins
de Jong	Duncan
Epp	Forseth
Frazer	Gilmour
Gouk	Grey (Beaver River)
Hanger	Hanrahan
Harper (Calgary West)	Harper (Simcoe Centre)
Harris	Hart
Hayes	Hermanson
Hoepfner	Johnston
Manning	Mayfield
McClelland (Edmonton Southwest)	Meredith
Mills (Red Deer)	Morrison
Penson	Riis
Ringma	Robinson
Schmidt	Scott (Skeena)
Solberg	Solomon
Strahl	Taylor
Thompson	White (Fraser Valley West)
White (North Vancouver)	Williams—46

Government Orders

NAYS

Members

Adams
Allmand
Arseneault
Assadourian
Augustine
Bachand
Barnes
Bellehumeur
Berger
Bernier (Beauce)
Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead)
Bethel
Bhaduria
Bodnar
Bouchard
Brown (Oakville—Milton)
Bryden
Calder
Caron
Cauchon
Chan
Chrétien (Saint-Maurice)
Cohen
Collins
Copp
Crawford
Culbert
Daviault
Deshaies
Dhaliwal
Dubé
Duhamel
Easter
Finlay
Fontana
Gaffney
Gagnon (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine)
Galloway
Gauthier (Roberval)
Godfrey
Graham
Grose
Guay
Harvard
Hopkins
Ianno
Irwin
Jacob
Keys
Kraft Sloan
Langlois
Lavigne (Beauharnois—Salaberry)
Lebel
Leblanc (Longueuil)
Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe)
Lincoln
Loubier
MacDonald
Malhi
Manley
Marchi
McCormick
McKinnon
McTeague
Mercier
Minna
Murphy
Ménard
Nunez
O'Reilly
Pagtakhan
Paré
Payne
Peters
Picard (Drummond)
Plamondon
Proud
Reed
Richardson
Ringuette—Maltais

Alcock
Anderson
Assad
Asselin
Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre)
Baker
Beaumier
Bellemare
Bergeron
Bernier (Gaspé)
Bertrand
Bevilacqua
Blondin—Andrew
Bonin
Boudria
Brushett
Bélair
Canuel
Catterall
Chamberlain
Chrétien (Frontenac)
Clancy
Collenette
Comuzzi
Cowling
Crête
Dalphond—Guiral
de Savoye
DeVillers
Dromisky
Duceppe
Dumas
Fillion
Flis
Fry
Gagliano
Gagnon (Québec)
Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier)
Gerrard
Godin
Gray (Windsor West)
Guarnieri
Guimond
Hickey
Hubbard
Iftody
Jackson
Jordan
Knutson
Landry
Laurin
Lavigne (Verdun—Saint-Paul)
LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso)
Lee
Leroux (Shefford)
Loney
MacAulay
MacLellan (Cape Breton—The Sydneys)
Maloney
Marchand
Marleau
McGuire
McLellan (Edmonton Northwest)
McWhinney
Milliken
Mitchell
Murray
Nault
O'Brien
Ouellet
Parrish
Patry
Peric
Phinney
Pickard (Essex—Kent)
Pomerleau
Péloquin
Regan
Rideout
Robichaud

Rocheleau
Sauvageau
Shepherd
Simmons
Speller
Steckle
Szabo
Terrana
Tobin
Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata)
Ur
Vanclief
Verran
Walker
Whelan

Rompkey
Serré
Sheridan
Skoke
St-Laurent
Stewart (Brant)
Telegdi
Thalheimer
Torsney
Tremblay (Rosemont)
Valeri
Venne
Volpe
Wells
Zed—190

PAIRED MEMBERS

Brien
Debien
Lalonde
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Peterson

Bélisle
Fechuk
Lefebvre
Mills (Broadview—Greenwood)
Young

(1745)

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 1 lost.

Mr. Gagliano: Mr. Speaker, I think you will find unanimous consent to apply the vote we just took to the remaining motions in amendment plus the report stage.

[Translation]

Mr. Massé: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was not here for the first vote, but I would like to participate in the second one if I may.

[English]

The Speaker: Hon. members have heard the proposal. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Hermanson: Mr. Speaker, just to make it clear, we are supporting the second vote on the motions; only the vote on the report stage would be reversed. I think we better make that clear.

The Speaker: It is absolutely clear.

(The House divided on Motion No. 2, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 27)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Althouse
Breitkreuz (Yellowhead)
Brown (Calgary Southeast)
de Jong
Epp
Frazer
Gouk
Hanger
Harper (Calgary West)
Harris
Hayes
Hoepfner
Manning
McClelland (Edmonton Southwest)
Mills (Red Deer)
Penson

Ablonczy
Benoit
Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville)
Cummins
Duncan
Forseth
Gilmour
Grey (Beaver River)
Hanrahan
Harper (Simcoe Centre)
Hart
Hermanson
Johnston
Mayfield
Meredith
Morrison
Riis

Ringma
Schmidt
Solberg
Strahl
Thompson
White (North Vancouver)

Robinson
Scott (Skeena)
Solomon
Taylor
White (Fraser Valley West)
Williams—46

NAYS

Members

Adams
Allmand
Arseneault
Assadourian
Augustine
Bachand
Barnes
Bellehumeur
Berger
Bernier (Beauce)
Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead)
Bethel
Bhaduria
Bodnar
Bouchard
Brown (Oakville—Milton)
Bryden
Calder
Caron
Cauchon
Chan
Chrétien (Saint-Maurice)
Cohen
Collins
Copp
Crawford
Culbert
Davialt
Deshaies
Dhaliwal
Dubé
Duhamel
Easter
Finlay
Fontana
Gaffney
Gagnon (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine)
Galloway
Gauthier (Roberval)
Godfrey
Graham
Grose
Guay
Harvard
Hopkins
Ianno
Irwin
Jacob
Keys
Kraft Sloan
Langlois
Lavigne (Beauharnois—Salaberry)
Lebel
Leblanc (Longueuil)
Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe)
Lincoln
Loubier
MacDonald
Malhi
Manley
Marchi
Massé
McGuire
McLellan (Edmonton Northwest)
McWhinney
Milliken
Mitchell
Murray
Nault
O'Brien
Ouellet
Parrish
Patry
Peric
Phinney
Pickard (Essex—Kent)
Pomerleau

Alcock
Anderson
Assad
Asselin
Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre)
Baker
Beaumier
Bellemare
Bergeron
Bernier (Gaspé)
Bertrand
Bevilacqua
Blondin—Andrew
Bonin
Boudria
Brushett
Bélair
Canuel
Catterall
Chamberlain
Chrétien (Frontenac)
Clancy
Collette
Comuzzi
Cowling
Crête
Dalphond—Guiral
de Savoye
DeVillers
Dromisky
Duceppe
Dumas
Fillion
Flis
Fry
Gagliano
Gagnon (Québec)
Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier)
Gerrard
Godin
Gray (Windsor West)
Guarnieri
Guimond
Hickey
Hubbard
Ifody
Jackson
Jordan
Knutson
Landry
Laurin
Lavigne (Verdun—Saint-Paul)
LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso)
Lee
Leroux (Shefford)
Loney
MacAulay
MacLellan (Cape Breton—The Sydneys)
Maloney
Marchand
Marleau
McCormick
McKinnon
McTeague
Mercier
Minna
Murphy
Ménard
Nunez
O'Reilly
Pagtakhan
Paré
Payne
Peters
Picard (Drummond)
Plamondon
Proud

Péloquin
Regan
Rideout
Robichaud
Rompkey
Serré
Sheridan
Skoke
St-Laurent
Stewart (Brant)
Telegdi
Thalheimer
Torsney
Tremblay (Rosemont)
Valeri
Venne
Volpe
Wells
Zed—191

Government Orders

Reed
Richardson
Ringue—Maltais
Rocheleau
Sauvageau
Shepherd
Simmons
Speller
Steckle
Szabo
Terrana
Tobin
Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata)
Ur
Vanclief
Verran
Walker
Whelan

PAIRED MEMBERS

Brien
Debien
Lalonde
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Peterson

Bélisle
Fewchuk
Lefebvre
Mills (Broadview—Greenwood)
Young

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada) moved that the bill be concurred in.

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 28)

YEAS

Members

Adams
Allmand
Arseneault
Assadourian
Augustine
Bachand
Barnes
Bellehumeur
Berger
Bernier (Beauce)
Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead)
Bethel
Bhaduria
Bodnar
Bouchard
Brown (Oakville—Milton)
Bryden
Calder
Caron
Cauchon
Chan
Chrétien (Saint-Maurice)
Cohen
Collins
Copp
Crawford
Culbert
Davialt
Deshaies
Dhaliwal
Dubé
Duhamel
Easter
Finlay

Alcock
Anderson
Assad
Asselin
Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre)
Baker
Beaumier
Bellemare
Bergeron
Bernier (Gaspé)
Bertrand
Bevilacqua
Blondin—Andrew
Bonin
Boudria
Brushett
Bélair
Canuel
Catterall
Chamberlain
Chrétien (Frontenac)
Clancy
Collette
Comuzzi
Cowling
Crête
Dalphond—Guiral
de Savoye
DeVillers
Dromisky
Duceppe
Dumas
Fillion
Flis

Government Orders

Fontana	Fry
Gaffney	Gagliano
Gagnon (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine)	Gagnon (Québec)
Galloway	Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier)
Gauthier (Roberval)	Gerrard
Godfrey	Godin
Graham	Gray (Windsor West)
Grose	Guarnieri
Guay	Guimond
Harvard	Hickey
Hopkins	Hubbard
Ianno	Ifody
Irwin	Jackson
Jacob	Jordan
Keyes	Knutson
Kraft Sloan	Landry
Langlois	Laurin
Lavigne (Beauharnois—Salaberry)	Lavigne (Verdun—Saint-Paul)
Lebel	LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso)
Leblanc (Longueuil)	Lee
Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe)	Leroux (Shefford)
Lincoln	Loney
Loubier	MacAulay
MacDonald	MacLellan (Cape Breton—The Sydneys)
Malhi	Maloney
Manley	Marchand
Marchi	Marleau
Massé	McCormick
McGuire	McKinnon
McLellan (Edmonton Northwest)	McTeague
McWhinney	Mercier
Milliken	Minna
Mitchell	Murphy
Murray	Ménard
Nault	Nunez
O'Brien	O'Reilly
Ouellet	Pagtakhan
Parrish	Paré
Patry	Payne
Peric	Peters
Phinney	Picard (Drummond)
Pickard (Essex—Kent)	Plamondon
Pomerleau	Proud
Péloquin	Reed
Regan	Richardson
Rideout	Ringuette—Maltais
Robichaud	Rocheleau
Rompkey	Sauvageau
Serré	Shepherd
Sheridan	Simmons
Skoke	Speller
St-Laurent	Steckle
Stewart (Brant)	Szabo
Telegdi	Terrana
Thalheimer	Tobin
Torsney	Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata)
Tremblay (Rosemont)	Ur
Valeri	Vanclief
Venne	Verran
Volpe	Walker
Wells	Whelan
Zed—191	

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Althouse	Benoit
Breitkreuz (Yellowhead)	Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville)
Brown (Calgary Southeast)	Cummins
de Jong	Duncan
Epp	Forseth
Frazier	Gilmour
Gouk	Grey (Beaver River)
Hanger	Hanrahan

Harper (Calgary West)	Harper (Simcoe Centre)
Harris	Hart
Hayes	Hermanson
Hoeppner	Johnston
Manning	Mayfield
McClelland (Edmonton Southwest)	Meredith
Mills (Red Deer)	Morrison
Penson	Riis
Ringma	Robinson
Schmidt	Scott (Skeena)
Solberg	Solomon
Strahl	Taylor
Thompson	White (Fraser Valley West)
White (North Vancouver)	Williams—46

PAIRED MEMBERS

Brien	Bélisle
Debien	Fewchuk
Lalonde	Lefebvre
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	Mills (Broadview—Greenwood)
Peterson	Young

* * *

(1750)

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 1994

The House resumed from April 11 consideration of the motion that Bill C-17, an act to amend certain statutes to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 22, 1994, be read the second time and referred to a committee; and of the amendment.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 45(5)(a), the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred division on the amendment.

The question is on the amendment.

The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:

*(Division No. 29)***YEAS**

Members

Althouse	Asselin
Bachand	Bellehumeur
Bergeron	Bernier (Gaspé)
Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead)	Bouchard
Canuel	Caron
Chrétien (Frontenac)	Crête
Dalphonf—Guiral	Daviault
de Jong	de Savoye
Deshaies	Dubé
Duceppe	Dumas
Fillion	Gagnon (Québec)
Gauthier (Roberval)	Godin
Guay	Guimond
Jacob	Landry
Langlois	Laurin
Lavigne (Beauharnois—Salaberry)	Lebel
Leblanc (Longueuil)	Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe)
Leroux (Shefford)	Loubier
Marchand	Mercier
Ménard	Nunez
Paré	Picard (Drummond)
Plamondon	Pomerleau
Péloquin	Riis
Robinson	Rocheleau
Sauvageau	Solomon
St-Laurent	Taylor
Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata)	Tremblay (Rosemont)
Venne—55	

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Adams
Allmand
Arseneault
Assadourian
Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre)
Barnes
Bellemare
Berger
Bertrand
Bevilacqua
Blondin—Andrew
Bonin
Breitkreuz (Yellowhead)
Brown (Calgary Southeast)
Brushett
Bélair
Catterall
Chamberlain
Chrétien (Saint—Maurice)
Cohen
Collins
Copp
Crawford
Cummins
Dhaliwal
Duhamel
Dupuy
Epp
Flis
Forseth
Fry
Gagliano
Galloway
Gerrard
Godfrey
Graham
Grey (Beaver River)
Guarnieri
Hanrahan
Harper (Simcoe Centre)
Hart
Hayes
Hickey
Hopkins
Ianno
Irwin
Johnston
Keys
Kraft Sloan
LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso)
Lincoln
MacAulay
Malhi
Manley
Marchi
Massé
McClelland (Edmonton Southwest)
McGuire
McLellan (Edmonton Northwest)
McWhinney
Milliken
Minna
Morrison
Murray
O'Brien
Ouellet
Parrish
Payne
Peric
Phinney
Proud
Regan
Rideout
Ringuette—Maltais
Rompkey
Scott (Skeena)
Shepherd
Simmons
Solberg

Ablonczy
Alcock
Anderson
Assad
Augustine
Baker
Beaumier
Benoit
Bernier (Beauce)
Bethel
Bhaduria
Bodnar
Boudria
Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville)
Brown (Oakville—Milton)
Bryden
Calder
Cauchon
Chan
Clancy
Collenette
Comuzzi
Cowling
Culbert
DeVillers
Dromisky
Duncan
Easter
Finlay
Fontana
Frazer
Gaffney
Gagnon (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine)
Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier)
Gilmour
Gouk
Gray (Windsor West)
Grose
Hanger
Harper (Calgary West)
Harris
Harvard
Hermanson
Hoepfner
Hubbard
Iftody
Jackson
Jordan
Knutson
Lavigne (Verdun—Saint—Paul)
Lee
Loney
MacLellan (Cape Breton—The Sydneys)
Maloney
Manning
Marleau
Mayfield
McCormick
McKinnon
McTeague
Meredith
Mills (Red Deer)
Mitchell
Murphy
Nault
O'Reilly
Pagtakhan
Patry
Penson
Peters
Pickard (Essex—Kent)
Reed
Richardson
Ringma
Robichaud
Schmidt
Serré
Sheridan
Skoke
Speller

Private Members' Business

Steckle
Strahl
Telegdi
Thalheimer
Tobin
Ur
Vanclief
Volpe
Wells
White (Fraser Valley West)
Williams

Stewart (Brant)
Szabo
Terrana
Thompson
Torsney
Valeri
Verran
Walker
Whelan
White (North Vancouver)
Zed—182

PAIRED MEMBERS

Brien
Debien
Lalonde
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Peterson

Bélisle
Fewchuk
Lefebvre
Mills (Broadview—Greenwood)
Young

(1800)

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

The House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

PRODUCT PACKAGING

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should seek to ensure that all manufacturers of foods and beverages be required to print "best before" and expiration dates clearly and legibly on the outside of the product packaging in a non-encoded format.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to encourage each member to support Motion No. 217.

Simply put, this motion is about the integrity of Canadian food in terms of freshness information, quality and health safety, as well as the interests of food manufacturers.

Where safety is the primary concern, an expiration date is critical. Products which pass their expiration date must be removed from the shelves. This applies primarily to vitamin products and single source foods which supply basic nutrition such as infant formula. The problem in the latter case may be one of loss of vital nutritional quality which could seriously affect the health of infants.

I would like to focus, however, the remainder of my debate on the issue of best-before dates. But whether we speak of best-before or expiration dates, it is in the best interests of all that they meet the standards of quality and legibility. It is also important that these dates not appear in a coded format. They must be easy for consumers to interpret.

Private Members' Business

(1805)

The motion represents in this sense a win-win situation for all parties concerned. It is an opportunity for the House to assume a leadership role on behalf of both the welfare of Canadian consumers and the competitive interests of Canadian industry.

At stake here is nothing less than the consumer confidence of a solid majority of Canadians. They would like to be assured that the foods and beverages they consume are safe, nutritious and wholesome. They would like to be assured that subtle and unseen defects in food quality are made known to them before more obvious, visible changes occur. They would like to be reassured that securing the integrity of Canadian food is given top priority by government.

The printing of best-before and expiry dates clearly and legibly on all products in a format easily understood by all is something Canadians should be able to claim as a right.

Currently food and beverage manufacturers are required to place best-before dates only on products with a shelf life or so-called durable life of 90 days or less, that is on most perishable goods. Yet as far back as 1987 consumers had expressed their wish to see date marking extended to canned and frozen foods which currently are often exempt from such requirements.

This consumer interest has not abated. A survey conducted in 1993 by the Grocery Products Manufacturers' Association of Canada showed that 97 per cent of consumers looked at best-before dates when buying a food product for the first time. Recent statistics therefore make the case for the motion before us more compelling and timely.

Many consumers groups including the Consumers' Association of Canada actively support the extension of date marking to all foods. The association has even gone one step further, supporting the view that prepackaged foods with a shelf life of less than 90 days should also bear a packaging date indicating when the product was first placed in its container and offered for sale.

Given the clear desire expressed by the consumers group for better, more comprehensive freshness information, and given that business thrives best when consumers wishes are met, one would expect the food industry's response to be one of voluntary compliance. This regrettably has not happened yet.

The Canadian industry's stance has to be revisited, particularly in light of the globalization of markets. It is known that European industries offer precisely what consumers want and expect where date marking is concerned.

The government, in the nation's interest should ask how would Canadian food products without the desired changes in date markings as alluded to earlier eventually compete with

imported products? Industry representatives have cited cost, wastage of products and the need for consumer education as reasons for their opposition to a new date marking system.

These are valid arguments, but I would ask these business people to consider the possibility that if consumers are able to access imported foods bearing more detailed dating information they may simply purchase these imported items rather than those made in Canada.

In other words, these food industry representatives may ultimately do themselves a disservice by allowing cost associated with implementing a new dating system to prevent them from honouring consumers' wishes. A new date marking system would best ensure competitiveness that in the end would allow for recovery of attendant costs.

I am encouraged that industry officials who participated in a recent Food and Drugs Act regulatory review stated their commitment to respond to consumers' preferences. This is a positive sign. At the same time I am discouraged that manufacturers are not yet providing on a voluntary basis the information consumers want.

(1810)

Since current Food and Drugs Act regulations are not meeting consumer demands this House should indicate its support for regulatory change. That quite simply is the purpose of this motion.

I would like to call to the attention of the House the three recent documents relevant to this motion that have been produced. This is a three volume document titled *A Strategic Direction for Change—A Review of the Regulations under the Food and Drugs Act*. I have here two of the volumes. These were recently completed by the health protection branch of Health and Welfare Canada in consultation with the former Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs whose food labelling function has since been transferred to the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

The first two volumes of this thorough one-year review of the regulations under the Food and Drugs Act were released last November and December respectively. The proposed implementation plan, volume three, was released just last month. I am encouraged that the proposed implementation plan addresses some of the desired ends of the motion. However, I believe more can be done and soon.

The implementation plan is disappointing on several counts. It states that the government will only "support the use of best-before dating on other products with a durable life of more than 90 days on a voluntary basis".

The revocation of durable life date exemptions for commissary foods and prepackaged doughnuts are the only concrete

Private Members' Business

steps taken to extend the best-before requirements. This is not enough. These requirements must be extended to all products.

In fact other parts of the plan state that in the course of drafting new regulations, the health protection branch will merely review current practices and consider requiring, dates on low acid or previously frozen foods. The words supporting, reviewing and considering, though well-intentioned, do not spell action to the consumer. Consumers want action, and now. To wait until October 1995 for prepublication of the new Food and Drugs Act regulations, as the proposed implementation plan calls for, will not give timely justice to the issue.

Admittedly there are some who would argue that they would not like to see yet another regulatory burden placed on Canadian businesses. This motion makes the case that this so-called regulatory burden would in fact be a regulatory blessing not only to consumers but to businesses as well. We have a responsibility as a nation to champion the causes of both private and corporate citizens.

Fellow members, recognize that limiting manufacturers' obligations to print best-before expiry dates shifts the burden of making informed purchases to the consumers. Recognize that Canada has an obligation to ensure its consumers are able to access superior products, preferably those manufactured in Canada, in their markets. Recognize as well that we, elected representatives, have an obligation to institute regulations which protect private and corporate interests. Recognize further that we have a duty to regulate in the national interest.

Permit me therefore to cite a specific example of an instance in which a better date marking system could benefit Canadian consumers. A man goes to a grocery store and purchases a jar of tomato sauce. The jar does not display a best-before date as it has a shelf life longer than 90 days if unopened.

One night the man opens the jar, pours out half of its contents and returns the remainder to his refrigerator. Several days later he re-opens the jar and notices that its contents have a foul odour. He examines the jar thoroughly to see whether its label contains any shelf life information. He finds none. What he does find is a cryptic string of numbers and letters on a remote corner of the label. The code reads: STD 10 305 N3 E500.

He calls a phone number on the label to determine what it means and is told by the operator that the code indicates the jar was processed on the 305th day of 1993. Who would know that, Mr. Speaker? I did not. Its contents if unopen are good from one to one and a half years. However, once opened the sauce has a durable life of just five to seven days but only if the product is kept refrigerated.

(1815)

The man is angry that he has wasted half a jar of the product. He is angry that he had no way of knowing how long it would retain its freshness without making a phone call. He wonders if other products in his cabinet may be subject to similar spoilage. In essence, he wants to know why manufacturers do not provide more detailed date information about their products in a format consumers can both recognize easily and understand fully. This example is a true to life story as brought to my attention by one of my constituents in Winnipeg North.

It is important to note that there are many other products such as carbonated soft drinks whose durable life is deemed to be longer than 90 days but is shorter than many consumers suspect, just a few months in many cases. As if to acknowledge that fact, Pepsi corporation recently instituted a voluntary date marking system for its diet canned and bottled soft drinks in the United States.

In the absence of such markings, what is to prevent consumers from stocking up on these products only to find they have spoiled in just a few weeks? It is common practice after all for supermarkets to sell particular items at a discount when their stock on those items begins to gather dust.

Again, this underscores the need to extend the practice of best before dating to all foods and beverages regardless of their shelf lives. What I and many consumers would like to see is a standardized label. Consumer groups informed the health protection branch that labels should be consumer friendly, that is clear, understandable and difficult to overlook.

At this time manufacturers of foods with durable lives of less than 90 days are only required to express best before dates as a stream of letters and numbers. The code begins with the last two digits of the year followed by the month expressed as an abbreviation and then the date. The words "best before" must precede the information given.

Presently a container of milk with a best before date of April 12, 1994 would bear the legend "best before 94A112". The fact is this code may not be comprehensible to other Canadians. What does A1 mean? Does 12 mean the twelfth day of the month or the twelfth day of the year? A standard letter, one of a particular colour, shape and size which consumers could immediately locate on all foods and read rather than decipher would provide an anchor for the eyes.

In my own experience I have found containers of milk or juice whose best before dates are smeared, printed in faint or small type or hidden away on a remote part of the product packaging.

It is laudable when government departments undertake an extensive process of consultation with an eye toward improving the regulatory framework of a particular piece of legislation, but

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the proposed implementation plan for regulatory reform under the Food and Drugs Act in my opinion could go even further with date marking requirements.

Knowledge, it is often said, is power. We should move to make certain that food manufacturers give consumers the power to make good choices, informed decisions about the foods they buy, bring home and serve to their families.

I urge all members of this House to register their support for motion M-217. Let us demonstrate to the food industry and in effect to all Canadian industries that we in government expect our businesses to remain accountable to the public at large, particularly when discharge of accountability means a return on investments many times over.

At stake here is consumer confidence in the integrity of Canadian food products and the competitiveness of Canadian food producers. We need to make it clear that meeting consumer demands is good business for Canadian business.

(1820)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I wish to commend my colleague from Winnipeg North for this motion which, in my opinion, will greatly benefit consumers in Quebec and Canada without forcing manufacturers to spend outrageous amounts to apply the new practices.

The introduction of this kind of motion is a clear indication of the member's interest, which I share, in the health of consumers and of the regard he has for them.

One must recognize that it is often difficult in this day and age to see and to interpret the labelling on products for sale. So, the House must absolutely ensure that manufacturers of food and beverages be required to print "best before" and expiration dates clearly and legibly in a non-encoded format. The Bloc Québécois will support the motion. We will do so, Mr. Speaker, for various reasons which I will outline.

All of us in the House are consumers who, when shopping, do not always look for the expiration date, so we can sometimes buy products which are past their prime. This motion will ensure that the expiration date is clearly marked, so consumers will avoid mistakes. Thanks to the improved labelling of food products, from now on consumers will be able to buy only fresh products. Clearly printing a product's expiration date will show consumers that the manufacturer respects his customers and cares about their welfare.

Such a measure would be in line with the management philosophy related to the implementation of "total quality" in our businesses, a philosophy focused on identifying and adequately meeting customers' needs.

Another aspect of the proposed measure is the health of Canadians and Quebeckers. Using products after their expiration dates may be hazardous to one's health and it is our duty to protect the health and welfare of our people. Our children must be able to rely on healthy products that will allow them to develop normally.

A society as advanced as ours must have the means to recognize the freshness of its food products: it is a sign of an advanced society.

But this debate seems paradoxical to me in some respects, given the unacceptable situation faced by hundreds of thousands of Canadians and Quebeckers who live at or below the poverty line, as one would expect in an underdeveloped society. Mr. Speaker, consumers need money to buy—that is of paramount importance.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that the Liberal Party of Canada made a list of election promises in the famous red book. Indeed, the Liberal government promised Canadians in the election last October to create jobs, real jobs. Where are these real jobs? In the infrastructure program that creates only temporary jobs? What has the government really done? It wants to close the military college in St-Jean, which will cost at least 1,000 jobs. In manpower training, the government refuses to transfer any jurisdiction, funds or staff to the provinces. In income security reform, it will cut \$7.5 billion over the next two years from the income of the poorest people in our society and thus cause poverty to increase, while tax shelters that benefit the wealthy are maintained.

The government must keep its promises to the people. It must now take concrete action instead of making pious wishes! Such action would involve not only the clear legible labeling of the freshness of products by manufacturers but also job creation, industrial restructuring, the conversion of military to civilian industry, help for small and medium-sized businesses and the creation of real jobs that will give Quebeckers and Canadians the money they need to buy fresh, clearly labeled products.

We talk about products available on the market, but if people have no money, how can they buy them? The mother who goes shopping for her family every week knows that well. How many mothers must choose what food to buy because they lack money? Parents no longer choose between shoes for the children and a summer vacation, but which child will have a new pair of shoes this year.

In the same vein, what can we say about the dozens of food banks all over Canada that are needed more and more so that thousands of Canadians and Quebeckers can eat regularly? Even worse, the almost permanent nature of these food banks is striking proof of the deep malaise affecting the Canadian economy.

(1825)

As recently as yesterday, I met the managers of Moisson–Mauricie, a food bank located in my riding of Trois–Rivières. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate them and congratulate all of the volunteers who work there and thank them, on behalf of the people, for the remarkable job they are doing.

Moisson–Mauricie provides food products to about ten organizations which then redistribute the food to the needy. I was told yesterday that sometimes the food bank did not have any food to hand out. To me, it is sheer nonsense, it is an alarming and unacceptable situation which shows how serious this issue is.

Given these concerns, on behalf of the Official Opposition, I reiterate our support of Motion No. 217.

[*English*]

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the motion presented to the House by the member of Parliament for Winnipeg North.

My hon. seat mate has asked us to support Motion M–217. It is worth conserving the words of this very thoughtful motion: “The government should seek to ensure that manufacturers of food and beverages be required to print best before and expiration dates clearly and legibly on the outside of product packaging in a non–encoded format”.

What my hon. friend is saying here is that when we go shopping for food products we should easily be able to understand what we are buying and how long that product will be good.

What he is saying is that easy to understand packaging labels should be a right. Canadians are proud that we produce the highest quality food products in the world. We should have labelling standards of an equally high standard.

Today food and beverage manufacturers are only required to place best before dates on products with a shelf life of up to 90 days. In fact, no shelf life standards exist and it is the manufacturer’s decision to determine the appropriate shelf life period for its products and label them accordingly. That is just not good enough.

It shifts an unreasonable burden on to consumers to make the purchasing decisions with no fair basis for making these decisions.

It puts manufacturers with rigorous standards at a disadvantage. It does not meet the highest possible standards that Canadians expect of our food products.

It is really quite extraordinary that we require all kinds of nutritional information to be printed on food packages but we fail to say when the food was produced and how long it retains its quality.

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According to the Grocer Products Manufacturers of Canada’s own survey 97 per cent of Canadians are interested in knowing the shelf life of products. The current lack of standards is not meeting consumer demands and quite frankly I think most Canadians would be astounded to learn how lax our formal standards really are.

The Consumer Association of Canada supports the extension of date marking to all food.

What we need, as my hon. colleague pointed out, is basic information presented in a straightforward manner. We need easy to read, easy to locate labels on all foods to give consumers the facts they need to make informed decisions.

There are complicated encoded messages on products so that manufacturers can determine their sales figures and inventory information. Why should information not be provided to consumers so they can know vital information about the same food products? If it is good enough for manufacturers to know the information why is it not good enough for consumers?

As we move to produce environmentally friendly products surely we can move to produce consumer friendly labelling on the most essential of all our products, our food.

Knowledge is power and consumers do not have all the knowledge they need. We all know that more and more people are stocking up on many foodstuffs through bulk purchases. Indeed all major supermarkets are encouraging consumers to do so through advertising and marketing strategies. Consumers have a right to know how long those products are good for before they stock up these bulk purchases.

(1830)

Another major trend in modern society is the move to foods purchased without packaging. We have all seen and used the bulk bins in our local groceries to scoop out bulk amounts of literally anything from soup to nuts.

Should there not be labels on these bins to tell consumers when the items were prepared and how long they retain their maximum quality? Should those foods not have some kind of durability date? Should products produced on totally different dates be mixed in the same bin? Surely what we need are some basic labels to give real meaning to the phrase health food.

This issue is not a philosophical debate; this is a completely practical matter. To see how modern our standards are, just last evening I walked through a local supermarket and examined the most primary foods to see which products had packaging dates and best–before labels. I do not want to name names or blame anyone. The problem is the lack of any uniform standards. While I was walking around last night I looked at the chicken and the hamburger packaging. They had labels which had both date packaged on the top and best–before written on the other corner. Somewhere between these two expressions was a date, but I had no idea what date it was: the date it was packaged or the best–before date. Not only that, the date that was on there was

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yesterday's date. Were those goods packaged yesterday, or was this the date when they were no longer any good?

Since all the meat packaged in that area had yesterday's date on it, I had to assume that was the day they were packaged but maybe I assumed wrongly. Maybe if I had bought those things today they would be past their best date.

On the major canned food goods in the store that I walked around which families stock up on for emergencies, there was almost no best-before dates. There was one major exception: sardines packaged in New Brunswick had very clear labelling and I salute the manufacturers for that. Some jars of peanut butter had best-before labelling and some did not. Some jams said to refrigerate after opening and some did not. Frozen foods had no best-before labelling at all.

I might have made some errors and I might have omitted some products, but this was when I was casually walking through the store and arbitrarily picking products up and checking. I also had somebody check each one if I could not find it on the label. We both may have missed it, but we both tried to find the best-before dates. In fact walking around the store last night I noticed that no packaged foods had any information about how long the product retained its quality once the seal was broken.

I am not claiming that the standards I found are typical of all products or all grocery stores. I am saying that there is no way of knowing what to expect precisely, because we lack something as simple and as important as an expiry date and a best-before date on many foods and beverages. They should be marked clearly and legibly on the outside of product packaging.

I have heard the argument that if people do not like the labelling standards on food at their local supermarket they should just shop somewhere else. I am afraid that many senior citizens in my riding of Hamilton Mountain would find it extremely difficult travelling from supermarket to supermarket to find easy-to-understand packaging. We are not talking about standards for luxury items. We are talking about standards for food, the most essential of all the goods we package.

Canadians should be entitled to know when the food they eat was prepared and how long the food they purchase maintains its freshness. We need such basic information about the food we consume.

I commend the member of Parliament from Winnipeg North for presenting this important motion to the House of Commons and I support him fully.

(1835)

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Winnipeg North has put forward a motion which

I believe all of us here can support at least in principle. I acknowledge each of you being here at this late hour tonight talking about food and I am very pleased to be speaking to this motion.

The motion recognizes that there are changes coming in consumer preference regarding the packaging of food and beverage products. These changes address the changing mindset in the marketplace. Combined with food safety concerns, Canadians are now more health conscious and selective. Canadians scrutinize the appearance, the quality as well as the labels of food and beverage products. As people tighten their belts they are increasingly paying attention to food prices. Ultimately this is the single most important factor to consider before purchase.

The Grocery Products Manufacturers of Canada have been polling grocery buying since 1987. They approached people buying groceries with the following question: "When you are buying a product for the first time from the supermarket or grocery store, what kind of information would you be sure to look for on the label of a new food product that you were buying for the first time?"

For every year that the study has been conducted from 1987 through to 1993 consumers have answered with unswerving consistency. They most want to see the list price. The second most desired information is the printing of best-before dates. The polling showed that cooking instructions and ingredients came in third and fourth place respectively.

This polling is only a snapshot of what consumers want on a more global basis, but it does show a consistent interest over six years for the appearance of best-before dates on packaged product. This demonstrates there is consumer support for and interest in this information.

The marketplace is where the consumer has economic influence to bring about change. However for companies to provide this information costs would have to be incurred. Special encoding machines have to be bought or slight modifications will have to be made to the existing machinery. Traditionally companies are loathe to increase their cost of production if they do not believe that there is going to be any basic positive economic spin-off.

In this case it has not been made clear to the companies that the printing of this information would increase the saleability of a product and that is something we need to consider in our debate on this topic. In supporting this motion we can help consumers get their message across to the processors and manufacturers if we give consideration to that element.

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It is interesting to note that some companies are voluntarily putting this information on their products. One of these companies is Pepsi-Cola. What I am about to say is definitely not an endorsement of Pepsi-Cola. However Pepsi has recognized the need for better, more accurate labelling on their products. They realize that Pepsi drinkers want to know how long their Pepsis will keep the fizz fresh. To meet this consumer demand Pepsi announced last week that it is going to be printing on all its products what it calls a freshness date, so watch that fizz. The date will be clearly and legibly stamped on the product and it will include the day, the month and the year.

This motion is an adequate response to one of the recommendations made by the health protection branch in 1993. It published a review of the regulations under the Food and Drugs Act entitled "A Strategic Direction for Change". This review was comprehensive and as such the recommendation that it be put forward came as a result of thoughtful review. We always need to consider that those particular reports contain nuggets of information that will lead us in the right direction. However we always have to look at that end user which is the consumer.

It stated that consumers expect the food label to provide basic information about the contents of the food, who made it and its shelf life in clear, understandable language that is easy to read, and we heard this from my hon. colleagues prior to my presentation tonight. This report also confirmed the need for best-before dates when it stated the main issues for consumers emerging from the consultation was a lack of ingredient information for many foods, the content and understandability of the ingredient list, the understandability of claims, and the need for best-before dating on more foods.

(1840)

This report goes on in greater detail about best-before dates. There was extensive interest from consumers regarding the extension of date marking to all foods both for packed on dates and best-before dates.

The Consumers Association of Canada advocated a date of manufacture. This organization also supported a durable life date for products with a shelf life of greater than 90 days in the case of low acid foods and hermetically sealed containers and refrigerated foods.

I wonder how many of us have purchased bags of hermetically sealed foods only to find they are really quite questionable in terms of freshness when they are opened.

Over all, although legibility was very important, the location of the information on the label was not a priority. In some cases providing information elsewhere on the label was acceptable.

Even the food industry representatives conceded the importance of consumer information and generally support such

current requirements as the ingredient listing on prepackaged foods and best-before dating.

Having said that, the food industry does have some concerns and legitimately so. First, it is not clear which products will be included under this motion and I would ask the hon. member to give some consideration to that as he goes forward in this debate on the next reading.

The report by the health protection branch stated that the extension of requirements for a durable life date to all foods was not generally supported by industry. They would prefer a voluntary approach rather than a legislated one. Interestingly the requirement for a durable life date given to food is a routine measure in European countries.

The industry cite cost, wasted product, and the need for consumer education as reasons to oppose mandatory best-before dates. This motion would apply it seems most easily to retail dry packaged goods. However as we all know these are not the only ones that are in the marketplace.

Like the speaker before me I too did some consultation but I spoke to some of my industry colleagues in Alberta who do not necessarily deal with dried packaged goods to determine what they might think of this motion because they are in the processing and manufacturing side of things.

The concern of industry members from the Alberta potato industry is with the application of the best-before date. They are concerned about the extent to which this motion would apply to fresh produce.

Presently they too are investigating the use of packed on dates as an attempt to satisfy the consumer demand for information on freshness. When you look at bags of potatoes and sometimes they are a bit soft or there is mushy stuff inside the bag it would be really helpful to see a packed on date on those bags.

Further when it comes to meat products, regulation becomes quite tricky. It is important that if we improve measures that they apply equally to all areas and that regulatory compliance is not overly complex. We see ourselves caught up so often in the food industry with regulations that are built on other regulations and they interact and overlap with other departments and it becomes really quite self-defeating.

As I have stated, I support this motion. It is clear that consumers want best-before and expiration dates to be printed clearly and legibly on the outside of product packaging in a non-encoded fashion. This is driven by a well-founded need for better information to be provided to consumers. This reflects the fact that consumers are better educated about health related issues and as a result of this more people are paying attention to what they eat and from where they are getting their food.

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I have also mentioned some concerns that the industry has put forward. We have to pay attention to the consumers' interest but we must also try to accommodate the concerns of the processors and manufacturer. When we construct regulations we should ensure that the printing of this information is based on a sound business decision, giving consideration to the marketplace and the consumer. We have to give consideration to the cost of the machinery needed for encoding, which is an additional cost of production.

(1845)

If the cost of production does not increase then the cost that is passed on to the consumer will be kept to a minimum and ultimately this is what we want.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this debate.

I would like to begin by thanking the hon. member for Winnipeg North for introducing this motion. The question of best-before dating is an important component of the labelling of food and beverages. This is an issue that affects all of us as consumers and it is certainly worthy of consideration by this House.

Under the food and drug regulations the labels of most perishable and semi-perishable prepackaged food with a shelf life of 90 days or less are required to carry a consumer friendly best-before date. The requirement is somewhat different for products that are packaged at the retail premises. These products must show the date they were packaged as well as the best-before date.

These regulations have been in place for almost 20 years and they are there so that consumers can easily determine how fresh a product is and how long it is likely to stay fresh. It is obvious that this is a very popular measure. The Grocery Products Manufacturers of Canada regularly conduct surveys of grocery attitudes of Canadian consumers. When they ask what kind of information consumers look for on a label, food products they are buying for the first time, best-before dates consistently rank at the top along with the price.

At the same time it seems there are some misconceptions about these dates. A best-before date is not an expiry date. Products do not go bad as soon as they pass the best-before date. This date is only a guide. If your milk is best-before April 12 you can still drink it on the 13th or the 14th or even later if it has been stored properly.

It is important to emphasize as well that this is not a question of food safety. There are regulations that enforce the use of expiry dates where there is a safety concern, such as infant formulas or formulated liquid diets.

This motion, however, would extend the regulations to require best-before dates on foods and beverages with a shelf life

longer than 90 days. While this is a popular idea and it might help consumers rotate products on their own shelves there are questions about how useful this information would be. It would entail additional costs for industry, costs that would have to be passed on to the consumer.

At present these products are not required to carry such information, although many manufacturers provide it on a voluntary basis for products like peanut butter and salad dressings.

One of the largest soft drink bottlers announced at the end of March that it would start putting freshness dates on its soft drinks. This subject was recently reviewed by the government in consultation with all interested parties during phase I of the review of the food and drug regulations. During this review all interested parties had a chance to be heard. It was an very open and up-front process.

We found strong support for retaining the present requirements for perishable and semi-perishable foods having a shelf life of 90 days or less. We also found support for the voluntary use of best-before dates of foods with a shelf life of more than 90 days.

During phase II of the review we will further study to ensure that the regulatory requirements adequately reflect current needs. Some changes are being proposed and we are continuing to review the regulations.

This whole question is a part of a larger area of food regulations. Since last summer food regulatory issues including food and beverage packaging and labelling which used to be dealt with by the food division of the former Consumer and Corporate Affairs of Canada have become a part of the mandate of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

I would like to take some time today to talk about the expanded role of that department. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada is one of the oldest government departments. It actually predates Confederation. Originally the department was responsible for immigration as well as agriculture. But times and the mandate of the department have changed.

(1850)

Immigration has not been part of the mandate for a long time but recently the department acquired not only the agri-food packaging and labelling functions of the former CCAC but also the food products branch of the former Industry, Science and Technology Canada.

These additions ensure that all federal services relating to the agri-food industry are housed under one roof, making it easier to do business with the federal government. Now the department's responsibilities extend all along the food chain, from the family farm to the food processor to the wholesale, retail and food service sector to the consumer's table.

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The department is now responsible for the inspection of a wide range of manufactured goods in 4,500 non-registered establishments as well as imports to ensure label compliances and consumer protection from economic fraud.

By providing a single access point for the administration of federal agri-food labelling regulations and policies, these organizational changes will benefit both consumers and the competitiveness of the Canadian food industry.

A single federal access point will provide more convenient and efficient service and greater national consistency and uniformity in the administration of its regulations and policies. It will also reduce the frequency in cost of after-the-fact label corrections.

Since the reorganization, the department has opened 12 offices across the country to provide single window access for people with concerns about labelling. The food division is now a part of the food production and inspection branch of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

The overall objective of this branch is to enhance marketability of agriculture and food products by eliminating or controlling plant and animal diseases and by facilitating compliances with food and safety quality standards.

Our present system of food inspection has served us well. Food safety has always been a priority for this department. Our track record is excellent and surveys consistently show that Canadians have more confidence in the safety of their food than do consumers in the United States.

Nowhere is the old expression "the proof of the pudding is in the eating" more appropriate. We are working with the provinces to develop a national inspection program that harmonizes standards across the country and streamlines the delivery of services. We are moving to a more market driven system in which the beneficiary of the inspection system is given the choice to pay for services deemed to be of value.

We are building new assurances of food safety into the system through the introduction of inspection methods like the hazard analysis and critical control points, internationally recognized as a most effective means of identifying and correcting problems during processing rather than at the end of production.

Although the focus of this motion is the best-before date on packaging, I would like to add another dimension. As a member who represents a large rural riding of Lambton—Middlesex in southwestern Ontario, I am very interested in food quality. I am a strong believer that foods produced and processed with chemicals that are banned in Canada should not be allowed into Canada. Our inspection methods are second to none.

We in Canada know that when we sit down to a chicken dinner which has been raised and processed in Canada meeting the most stringent standards that we are eating wholesome chicken. This may not be true with U.S. chicken which can be dipped in trisodium phosphate or zapped with gamma rays to pass inspection.

As consumers, we must continue to have programs in place to protect the high quality of food Canadians have enjoyed. Our platform committed us to ensuring that only safe, wholesome food enters the Canadian market. This is exactly what we are doing and we are working hard to do it efficiently.

To conclude, whatever we do to improve industry competitiveness, consumer safety will not be compromised.

I strongly support the member in his motion.

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak in this debate today.

First I would like to thank the hon. member for Winnipeg North for raising this important issue. I believe that Canadian consumers are very discriminating when it comes to freshness and quality of food products. I also believe that it is in the best interests of the Canadian food industry and this government to ensure a healthy and safe food supply.

The issue that the hon. member is raising is one that certainly is deserving of our attention today.

(1855)

I want to take the focus off of this particular motion for a moment and perhaps put a different focus on this. As a primary producer I want to tell my colleagues in this House that having been at the root source of the products that we sometimes take so for granted it is important to recognize that there has been a lot of effort put into the manufacturing or the producing agencies. The farmers have done so very much to ensure that we have safe products. As we walk through our aisles in our food stores we recognize and take for granted the food that we see there. There is so much of it, particularly those of us who have travelled in areas of the world where they do not have the abundance that we enjoy.

We also take for granted that all the food we have on our shelves is safe and that should be encouraged and I would hope that the policies that we enforce in this country will continue to ensure we have that safe supply of food.

Some time recently I read an article which indicated the calamities that befall those people who short-change the health inspection system. Our American neighbours in the process of trying to expedite things formed a system called the streamline inspection system. This system was brought into being so that they could accommodate the inspection of chicken products as they were going through the assembly line much more quickly.

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There were consequences. An article appeared in a paper which indicated one child had died, another 300 people had fallen ill to salmonella. They have since turned from that policy in other directions concerning inspection.

In 1991 another article that was posted in a paper coming from south of the border indicated that meat safety labels were going to cost \$500 million a year more because they were implementing new safe handling label requirements. These were announced by the USDA that particular day.

We see that we cannot short-change the system without consequences. Our food supplies in this country, while not only having been safe, have also been reasonably priced. I think that is another thing we need to recognize. Thirty-seven per cent of the food that we buy today is consumed in other than our homes, particularly in restaurants and other eating establishments; 63 per cent of the food that we buy is consumed in our homes. This came to light in a recent discussion we had in a public forum on GST debate.

We have to recognize that in this country we have been blessed. We have a great food source. We have reasonably priced food and it is also a safe source.

It is important to note that this is something we have perhaps taken for granted. We have all gone to our refrigerators and found that there was food there which we thought was quite edible and yet found that it was not. As my hon. friend has already indicated, there are codes which most of us do not read and perhaps all of us do not understand.

At this point I would like to discuss the packaging and the labelling regulations in Canada and some of the issues that revolve around them. Under the food and drug regulations which are administered by the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the labels on most perishable and semi-perishable pre-packaged foods with a shelf life of 90 days or less are required to show a durable life date, commonly referred to as best before date, in a clear non-encoded manner.

The product should also display storage instructions if it needs to be stored at other than room temperature. This is only applicable when the food is packaged at the non-retail level. When the product is packaged on retail premises the regulations require the label to show the packaging date instead of the best before date. For prepackaged foods with a longer shelf life, such as canned or frozen foods, manufacturers currently use a coded dating system for their own inventory control purposes. In many instances the manufacturers will voluntarily display a best before date for customers to use.

For example, peanut butter and salad dressing commonly have best before dates, though they do not have to.

(1900)

The purpose of these regulations, which were introduced in 1974 and became effective in 1976, is to provide consumers with useful information regarding the relative freshness and potential shelf life of food.

It is important to remember that foods which have exceeded the best before date before being sold may still be acceptable for consumption but they may not be as fresh. However, this is not a health issue. When safety is an issue, such as with infant formulas or formulated liquid diets, products must carry expiry dates.

Consumer surveys show the importance consumers attach to best before dating. Many surveys done in Canada reveal that after cost freshness, as has already been mentioned tonight, is the most important food quality consumers look for, followed by nutrition and composition. The freshness of a product tends to be equated with health and safety.

A survey done for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in 1992 showed that 94 per cent of consumers usually or always look for the best before date when they shop for groceries.

The requirements for durable life dating information on food labels have strong support and acceptance by consumers and industry groups alike which see these as effective ways to produce useful product freshness information to consumers.

There is no doubt that best before dating is an important issue for consumers. The current system is working well in Canada and I think it should continue to be voluntary for products with longer shelf lives.

Canada boasts one of the safest and healthiest food supplies in the world. We are recognized internationally for the quality of our food and our safety standards. This is the result of co-operation between government and industry. I encourage everyone to keep up the good work.

I commend my colleague from Winnipeg North for this timely and important motion.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired. Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the item is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[*Translation*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

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The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I must inform you that we will change the order of proceedings. I will first give the floor to the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve): Mr. Speaker, last March 18, I asked the Minister of Justice what I felt was an extremely important question which was also very much in the news following the release of the annual report of the Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, Mr. Yalden. The question had to do with sexual orientation and more specifically with the recognition of same-sex couples.

At that time, there was a controversy and the issue made the news. Since 1979 Commissioner Yalden and his team have reminded us that it is a basis of discrimination and that, although various common law courts across the country have rendered decisions on the issue—and later we can go back to specific cases which set precedents—the Canadian Human Rights Act and, more fundamentally, even the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, do not specify that sexual orientation should be a prohibited ground of discrimination.

This creates a rather absurd situation in that no appropriate safeguards exists because the legislature has not, at least in any substantial way, updated the Canadian legislation since it was first passed in 1977. By contrast, most provinces, including Quebec which has always been a leader in that field, recognize in their charter that discrimination based on sexual orientation is a prohibited ground of discrimination.

I was very surprised to see that the minister, who was said to be courteous as well as one of the more liberal members of Cabinet, pussyfoot around the issue and seemingly unable to give clear indications of his government's intention to make very specific changes to correct this injustice.

(1905)

By rising in the House this evening, I hope to get some additional information and some genuine assurances that, as we are hearing from departmental circles, a bill will in fact be tabled in the fall, as many groups are demanding. The Human Rights Committee has heard representations on the subject from a number of witnesses and groups.

I see that you are signalling to me that my time is nearly up so I will conclude my remarks. It is important to remember that this kind of discrimination takes many forms. Consider, for example, one case that was before the courts involving a homosexual couple that had lived together for nearly 15 years. When the father of one of the partners died, the other was unable to get leave to attend his father-in-law's funeral. A major effort is needed in this area and I hope that we can count on the minister to act speedily and with an open mind to bring about the necessary changes.

[English]

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve asked a question of the Minister of Justice about amendments to the Canadian Human Rights Act in this House on March 18, 1994, as he mentioned.

In the throne speech the Prime Minister committed the government to amending the Canadian Human Rights Act. These amendments will add the ground of sexual orientation to the 10 grounds on which discrimination is prohibited in the federal public and private sectors under the act as it currently stands in the statute books.

In fact, on August 6, 1992 a case brought under the equality guarantees of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, *Haig and Birch v. Canada*, the Court of Appeal of Ontario ordered that the Canadian Human Rights Act must be read to include that ground as of that date. The Attorney General of Canada at the time did not appeal the order to the Supreme Court of Canada. The government views this as the current and correct state of the law.

Therefore the amendment to which this government is committed to making would give Parliament the opportunity of bringing the act up to date.

I want to add that this government views this amendment as a matter of fundamental justice and not as a matter of conferring special rights to a particular group in Canada. The amendment would ensure gays and lesbians and moreover heterosexuals protection against discrimination in the areas of services and employment and against hate propaganda which are covered by the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Such an amendment would not be a departure from what has been going on in other jurisdictions of our country. Eight provinces and territories, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Yukon, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, British Columbia and Saskatchewan, have already amended their human rights legislation to add the ground of sexual orientation.

The level of protection is now the norm in Canada. This government wants to add the federal laws against discrimination to this list and thereby assure Canadians—

[Translation]

OLD AGE SECURITY

Mr. Gaston Péloquin (Brome—Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party's position on old age security is so complex and unclear that we cannot make any sense of it. Contrary to what the Minister of Human Resources Development suggested when I asked him questions on that matter, the Official Opposition is not alone in its concern over this confusion.

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This confusion is not a figment of our imagination. It is the result of contradictory statements by the Minister of Human Resources Development and the Prime Minister. Senior citizens associations also reacted strongly against the government's hidden agenda. Our senior citizens demand clear answers on the future of their social programs.

(1910)

Last month, when I asked the minister about that, I asked him to apologize to seniors he had upset. Indeed, after the minister indicated that Canadians could have to choose between old age pensions and youth training programs, he was rebuffed by the Prime Minister who said that his government had no intention of touching old age pensions.

The federal government is brutally attacking the seniors' meagre income by taking \$490 million out of their pockets. Not only is the minister refusing to apologize for having upset these people, he is now increasing their tax burden when they cannot do anything to increase their income. This measure will affect more than 800,000 seniors, 600,000 of whom earn between \$25,000 and \$50,000.

Besides, statistics show that the vast majority of these 600,000 seniors have income of about \$25,000. The government should stop saying that only the well-to-do seniors will be affected by these drastic and unfair fiscal measures.

How could seniors regain the \$200, \$300 or \$400 they lose every year and that they need to survive? Will we force them to go back on the job market? Will they have to cut back on their outings, their housing or their food? Can the minister give us a clear answer as to the future of the income security programs for the people who built this country?

[*English*]

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Human Resources Development stated clearly in this House that it is not the government's intention to touch old age security benefits and I would refer members to page 56 of the budget papers which sets out increases in OAS which will take place over the next few years.

The government is not looking at reducing the pensions of Canada's seniors. There is a responsibility by the government to ensure that the next generation of Canadians can have the same security as this generation.

Our society is aging and we need to prepare for a doubling of the senior population over the next several decades. We must begin now to be ready for these changes. The aging of society

brings with it opportunities as well as challenges and the issue is one of readiness, not cost cutting.

The government's paper will not focus only on pensions but will look at aging more broadly. While we must of course be fiscally responsible and ensure sustainable programs we know that planning for an aging society cannot be done overnight.

Governments, employers, individuals and families cannot engage in short term thinking. Canadians know that the sooner you begin planning for retirement the more likely you will be to have the kind of retirement you want. That is as true for this nation as it is for individuals. Now is the time to start looking at the kind of programs today's working age Canadians will need and want for their retirements in the next century.

The paper we are preparing will be about people, their values, needs and responsibility. We will look at trends in our society, the fact that people are living longer and healthier lives, the fact they are retiring younger and living longer, the fact that family structures have changed, especially with regard to the role of women and that of a number of older seniors, those over age 85—

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the member but the time is up.

[*Translation*]

RIGHTS OF FRANCOPHONES

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu): Mr. Speaker, I asked the minister a question and thought that his answer was clear, which was surprising coming from this minister. But the fact of the matter is that francophone and Acadian communities in Canada are still facing the same problems resulting from cuts.

I had put the following question to the minister: in view of some discrepancies between his own statements and those of his senior officials, can the minister confirm that funding for the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada will not be cut by 5 per cent?

(1915)

And the minister's answer was: "I am pleased to say that we have managed to spare communities such as the one he just mentioned from existing cuts in my department." That sounded clear to me, but these communities keep getting conflicting information. I did not get to ask a supplementary question at the time. Had I had the opportunity, perhaps I could have got the minister to be more specific as to what cuts were made in funds allocated to the Francophonie.

Since I have four minutes to discuss the issue, I would like to take this opportunity to ask the parliamentary secretary whether the Court Challenges Program, a program abolished by the Conservatives that the Liberals were talking about restoring,

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will be restored? Will this equity program for minorities in Canada be restored and what kind of funding will it have?

I would also like to get more specific information on the cuts made in the Francophonie budget because, as much as the minister claims that overall operations are not affected, there are other programs of paramount importance to the Francophonie. Take for example the operating budget of certain small associations, not that of the large Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, important as it may be. There is also the community radio assistance program. Is that program affected by this 5 per cent cut on top of the 10 per cent cut already made by the Conservatives? Is the postal subsidy cut? Will the aid to French-language publications be cut? What about the \$112 million school governance program that Lise Bissonnette, the editor of *Le Devoir*, called a way of subsidizing illegality? Will it be eliminated?

Francophone and Acadian communities want an unequivocal answer. Unfortunately, the Bloc Québécois members are the ones fighting for Francophone communities outside Quebec, while their own elected representatives in Ontario, New Brunswick and western Canada, themselves francophones, do not take the trouble to defend the interests of their own people and press the minister to give them a clear answer. I have no use for one of the minister's typical grey answers. It is either black or white. Are there cuts, yes or no?

Mr. David Walker (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the educational rights of francophones outside Quebec are clearly recognized in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These rights were clarified by two Supreme Court decisions: the Mahé case in 1990 and the Manitoba reference in 1993.

Most provinces and territories have school legislation consistent with Section 23 of the Charter. School governance has been granted or soon will be.

[English]

Education is under provincial jurisdiction. The role of the federal government is to assist the provinces to meet their constitutional obligations.

For almost 25 years the federal government has helped the provincial and territorial governments to provide members of the French minority community with the opportunity to be educated in their own language.

Since the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into effect in 1982, statistics show that more and more young francophones are educated in their own language.

[Translation]

The federal government recognizes that francophone minority groups still face difficulties, but it is working to address these deficiencies.

[English]

French minority language education remains a high priority for the federal government and for the Department of Canadian Heritage. That is why the special initiatives on school governance and post-secondary education in French have been exempted from the latest budgetary restrictions. It is expected that federal-provincial agreements negotiated under these initiatives will result in significant improvements for the francophone communities in these provinces.

[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup): Mr. Speaker, on March 18, 1994, I put a question to the Deputy Prime Minister concerning her sensitivity to the plight of the unemployed.

I realized how powerless the Deputy Prime Minister was in the face of the unemployment problem. Since then, I have also come to realize how powerless the Minister of Finance is and how he has failed to take any action to address the situation. In the words of Mr. Laurent Laplante, a respected journalist, "by focusing all of their efforts on wresting the inflation monster to the ground, the Conservatives ended up dragging the country into the first ever made-in-Canada recession. Mr. Martin has decided to go one step further and make the recession permanent."

As a complement to the question I am going to ask, and to which the minister did not really answer, I would like to echo the voice of that young engineer who stunned everyone at the seminar on employment, a few days ago, when he said that he had a master's degree in a very specialized field and nobody was able to find him a job. This sort of broke the empty rhetoric usually heard at such gatherings.

I would like to know whether or not the government has a job creation strategy based on some government action, and really established as a primary objective of the government. At the present time, we only see some sprinkling here and there. The infrastructure program will create almost no jobs for women and, anyway, it is just a drop in the unemployment bucket. There are no programs for specific groups either.

Was anything announced for unskilled workers? What do we have for graduates in various trades, technologists or university graduates? Is there anything specific to ensure the recovery of entrepreneurship in Quebec and Canada?

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I would like the government to finally give us some answers on this and really get to work instead of riding the wave as far as job creation is concerned.

[English]

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is referring to a comprehensive strategy on job creation, I would like for him to be mindful of the fact that the government has really begun a process of modernizing and restructuring Canada's social security system, creating job opportunities through the infrastructure program, the Canada youth corps and the national apprenticeship training system.

I am sure the hon. member would have to agree that since we have taken office in October over 100,000 jobs have been created.

We want to not only create jobs but they should be long term, high paying jobs. What is important to note about the jobs that

we have created thus far, particularly the latest statistic released recently, is the fact that these are full time jobs. They are not the part time jobs that we saw during the Conservative years. These are full time jobs that will once again provide to Canadians, particularly young Canadians, the type of confidence that is required to bring about economic renewal in our country.

There is no question about the fact, and I remember his question clearly about the Group of Seven and the industrialized countries, that to them unemployment is an important challenge to face. That is why we are looking at ways to upgrade our training programs. We are looking at the entire social security system and ways to modernize and make it relevant to the lives of Canadians in the 1990s and beyond.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 7.23 p.m. this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7.23 p.m.)

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